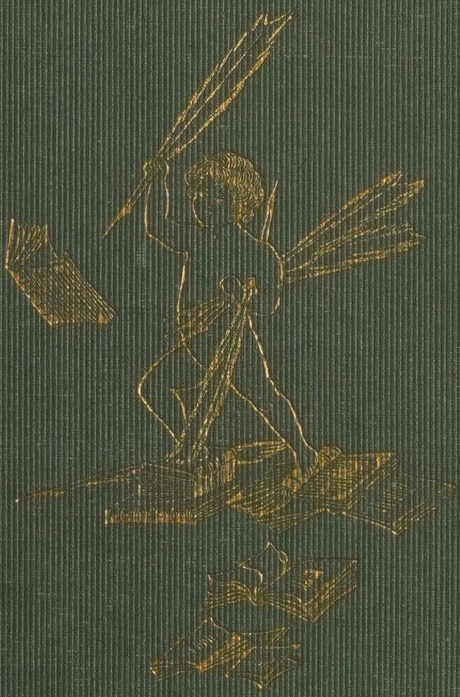

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THE LITERARY SHOP

AND OTHER TALES

BY

JAMES L. FORD

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SECOND EDITION

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AUTHOR'S NOTE.

MANY of these papers are new. Others are reprinted by permission from *Puck* and *Truth*.

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THE LITERARY SHOP

CHAPTER I.

IN AN OLD GARRET.

I AM lying at full length on a broken-down haircloth sofa that has been placed near the cobwebby window of an old garret in a country farm-house. It is near the close of a rainy day, and all the afternoon I have listened to the pattering of the heavy drops on the shingled roof, the rustling of the slender locust-trees and the creaking of their branches as the wind moves them.

There are pop-corn ears drying on the floor of this old garret; its solid rafters

are festooned with dried apples and white onions. Odd bits of furniture, and two or three hair trunks bearing initials made with brass-headed nails, are scattered about the room, and from where I lie I can see a Franklin stove, a pair of brass andirons, and one of those queer wooden-wheeled clocks that used to be made in Connecticut years ago, and which are a fitting monument to the ingenuity of the Yankee race.

Every article in the room is carefully treasured, and none is held in more tender regard than are certain square, dust-covered packages of what might be old newspapers that are piled up in big heaps beside the old chairs and tables. One of these bundles lies on the floor beside my sofa, with its string untied and its contents scattered carelessly about. Look down and you will see that it contains copies of the *New York Ledger*, of a year that was one of the early seventies, and

which have been religiously preserved, together with fully twoscore of other similar bundles, by the excellent people who dwell in the house.

The number which I hold in my hand contains instalments of four serials, as many complete stories, half a dozen poems, contributions by Henry Ward Beecher, James Parton, and Mary Kyle Dallas, and a number of short editorials and paragraphs, besides two solid nonpareil columns of "Notices to Correspondents." One of the serials is called "The Haunted Husband; or, Lady Chetwynde's Specter," and deals exclusively with that superior class of mortals who go to make up what a great many of the old *Ledger* readers would have called "carriage trade." Another story, "Unknown; or, The Mystery of Raven Rocks," bears the signature of Mrs. E. D. N. Southworth, a name venerated in every household in which a red-plush photograph-album is treasured as

a precious *objet d'art.* The short stories are simple and innocuous enough to suit the most primitive of brain-cells. The fiction is embellished with three pictures, which are interesting as specimens of a simple and now happily obsolete school of art.

The "Notices to Correspondents" are a joy forever, and reflect with charming simplicity and candor the minds of the thousands of anxious inquirers who were wont to lay all their doubts and troubles at Robert Bonner's feet.

It is here that the secrets of the maiden heart are laid bare to the gaze of the whole world. It is here that we read of the young man who is "waiting on" a young widow and formerly "kept company with" a lady friend who is the cashier of the laundry which he patronizes. Not knowing which of the two he ought to marry, he pours out his soul in this free-for-all arena of thought and discus-

sion. "Mary X." writes from Xenia, O., to inquire if she is a flirt because she has a new beau every two weeks, and is solemnly warned by Mr. Bonner that if she goes on in that way she "will soon have no beaux at all." "L. L. D." is a young girl of eighteen, whose parents are addicted to drink. She wishes to know if it is proper for her to correspond with a young gentleman friend who is a telegraph-operator in Buffalo and has made her a present of a backgammon-board last Christmas. That these letters are genuine is proved by their tone of artless simplicity, and by the fact that no single mind or score of minds could invent the extraordinary questions that were propounded from week to week.

Careful perusal of the *Ledger* lyrics reveals a leaning on the part of the poets of that period toward such homely themes as "The Children's Photographs," "The Mother's Blessing," and "Down by the

Old Orchard Wall." They are all written on the same plane of inanity, and are admirably well suited to the tastes of the admirers of Mrs. Southworth and Sylvanus Cobb, Jr.

It is growing dark in the old garret—too dark to read—and I arise from the horsehair sofa, filled with memories of the past which have been awakened by perusal of the yellow sheet of twenty years ago. As I tie up the bundle and place it on the dust-covered heap with its fellows, my eye falls upon a dozen packages, different in shape from these and containing copies of the *Century Magazine* for the past decade, which are preserved with the same tender care that was once bestowed upon the *Ledger* alone.

But as I slowly descend the staircase my mind is full of the favorite old story-paper, and of the enormous influence which its Scotch proprietor, Robert Bonner, exerted over the literature of his

day and generation — an influence which is still potent in the offices of the great magazines which now supply us with reading matter. I doubt if there has ever been, in this country, a better edited paper than the *Ledger* was in the days when its destinies were shaped by the hand of its canny proprietor. No editor ever understood his audience better, or, knowing his readers, was more successful in giving them what they wanted, than was Robert Bonner, whose dollars accumulated in his own coffers even as the files of his paper accumulated in country garrets in all parts of this broad land.

"Well, where do you find evidences of such careful editing in that hotch-potch which you describe so carefully?" I hear some carping critic ask, and as I run my eye over what I have written I realize that I have utterly failed in my attempt to convey an idea of the glories of that particular number of the *Ledger*. I would

say, however, to my critical friend that the paper is well edited because it does not contain a line of prose or a stanza of verse that is not aimed directly at the hearts and minds of the vast army of farmers, midwives, gas-fitters' daughters, and the blood-relations of janitors who constituted its peculiar *clientèle*. And I would add that if the critical one desires to get at the very bone and sinew of *Ledger* literature he should make a careful study of the poems which were an important feature of it, and in which may be found the very essence of the great principles by which the paper was guided.

Indeed, Mr. Bonner used to be more particular about his poetry than about his prose, and always read himself every line of verse submitted to him for publication. Some of the poems were written by women of simple, serious habits of thought; but a great many of the highly moral and instructive effusions that were

an important feature of the paper were prepared by ungodly and happy-go-lucky Bohemians, who were glad to eke out the livelihood earned by reporting with an occasional "tenner" from Mr. Bonner's treasury. These poets studied the great editor's peculiarities and personal tastes as carefully as the most successful magazine contributors of to-day study those of the various Gilders, Johnsons, Burlingames, and Aldens who dominate American letters in the present year. For example, no horses in *Ledger* poems were ever permitted to trot faster than a mile in eight minutes, and it was considered sagacious to name them Dobbin or Old Bess. Poems in praise of stepmothers or life-insurance were supposed to be distasteful to the great editor, but he was believed to have an absolute passion for lyrics which extolled the charm of country life and the homely virtues of rural folk. If a poet wrote more than one rhyme to

the quatrain he was warned by his fellows not to ruin the common market.

And now I hear from the carping critic again: "But you don't mean to tell me that any good poetry was produced by such a process? Why, suppose one of our great magazines—"

"Who said anything about good poetry? It was good poetry for the *Ledger* subscribers to read, and as to the great modern magazines—haven't I told you already that I stumbled over a heap of them just as I was leaving the old garret where the pop-corn and the wreaths of dried apples and the bundles of *Ledgers* are kept?"

CHAPTER II.

THE "LEDGER" PERIOD OF LETTERS.

A QUARTER of a century hence, perhaps, one of those arbiters of taste to whom poetastry owes its very existence will lecture before the intellectual and artistic circles of that period on "The Literary Remains of the Bonnerian Period"; and the *Ledger* school of poetry, long neglected by our critics, will become a fashionable cult. I hope, too, that the names of those writers who, as disciples of that school, gave an impetus to those great principles which live to-day in the beautifully printed pages of our leading periodicals will be rescued from the

shades of obscurity and accorded the tardy credit that they have fairly won.

These principles have lived because they were founded on good, sound, logical common sense, for Mr. Bonner possesses one of the most logical minds in the world. In the days when he was—unconsciously, I am sure—moulding the literature of future generations of Americans, he was always able to give a reason for every one of his official acts; and I doubt if as much can be said of all the magazine editors of the present day. It was this faculty that enabled his contributors to learn so much of his likes and dislikes, for if he rejected a manuscript he was always ready to tell the author exactly why the work was not suitable for the *Ledger*.

For instance: One day a maker of prose and verse received from the hands of the great editor a story which he had submitted to him the week before.

"If you please," said the poet, politely, "I should like to know why you cannot use my story, so that I may be guided in the future by your preferences."

"Certainly," replied Mr. Bonner. "This story will not do for me because you have in it the marriage of a man with his cousin."

"But," protested the young author, "cousins do marry in real life very often."

"In real life, yes," cried the canny Scotchman; "but not in the *New York Ledger!*"

And it is related of this talented young maker of prose and verse, that he changed his hero and heroine from cousins to neighbors, and the very same night was seen in Pfaff's quaffing, smoking, and jesting with his fellow-poets, and making merry over the defeat that was turned into a victory. And in the generous fashion of Bohemia he told all his comrades

that "Bonner was down on cousins marrying"; and thereafter neither in song nor story did a *Ledger* hero ever look with anything but the eye of brotherly affection on any woman of even the most remote consanguinity.

"In real life, yes; but not in the *New York Ledger!*"

That gives us a taste of the milk in the cocoanut, although it does not account for the hair on the outside of the shell.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Bonner knew that a great many of his subscribers did not approve of a man marrying his own cousin when there were plenty of other folks' cousins to be had for the asking; and so, rather than cause a moment's annoyance to a single one of these, he forbade the practice in the columns of his paper.

I knew a number of these *Ledger* writers in my salad days, and have often heard

them discussing their trade and the condition of the market in a way that would have lifted the hair of some of the *littérateurs* of the modern "delightfully-Bohemian-studio-tea" and kettledrum school.

Years ago one of them confided to me his recipe for a *Ledger* poem. "Whatever you do," he said, "be careful not to use up a whole idea on a single poem, for if you do you'll never be able to make a cent. I usually cut an idea into eight pieces, like a pie, and write a poem for each piece, though once or twice I have made sixteen pieces out of one. My 'Two Brothers' idea yielded me just sixteen poems, all accepted, for which I received $160. What do I mean by cutting up an idea? Well, I'll tell you. I took for a whole idea two brothers brought up on a farm in the country, one of whom goes down to the city, while the other stays at home on the farm. Well, I wrote eight

poems about those brothers, giving them such names as Homespun Bill and Fancy Jake, and the city man always went broke, and was glad to get back to the country again and find that Homespun Bill had either paid the mortgage on the place or saved the house from burning, or done something else calculated to commend him to the haymakers who subscribed for the paper. Then I wrote eight more, and in every one of those it was the yokel who got left; that is to say, Fancy Jake or Dashing Tom, or whatever I might choose to call him, would go to the city and either get rich in Wall Street — always Wall, never Broad or Nassau Street or Broadway, remember — and come back just in time to stop the sheriff's sale and bid in the old homestead for some unheard-of figure, or else he would become a great physician and return to save his native village at a time of pestilence, or maybe I'd have him a

great preacher and come back and save all their souls; anyway, I got eight more poems out of the pair, to say nothing of some stories that I used in another paper."

I pondered for several moments over the words of the poet and then I said to him, "But if you were so successful with the 'Two Brothers,' why didn't you try to do as well with two sisters?"

"I did," he replied. "I started a 'Two Sisters' series as soon as the brothers were all harvested, but I got them back on my hands again. You know Bonner is down on sisters."

"Bonner is down on sisters!"

What stumbling-blocks there were in the path to literary fame which the poets of the early *Ledger* period sought to tread!

Fancy the feelings of one who has poured out his whole soul in a poem descriptive of sisterly love and learns that his labor has been in vain, not because of any fault on his part, not because his

poem is not good, but simply and solely because "Bonner is down on sisters"! And then I hear the carping critic ask if I call that good editing. I say that it was the very best of editing. At any rate, it was good enough to make the *Ledger* fiction popular from one end of this country to the other; and it is because of that editing that we still find the old dusty files in the country garrets, along with the pop-corn ears and the wreaths of dried apples. I wonder how much of the ephemeral literature of today will be found sacredly guarded in anybody's garret a quarter of a century hence?

But there were other folks besides sisters and matrimonial cousins who were regarded with disfavor by the great editor and thinker who long ago set the pace for modern American fiction.

Well do I remember Jack Moran coming upon us one bright morning, a dozen

years ago, with bitter invective on his lips because his poem, "The Stepmother's Prayer," had been returned to him from the *Ledger* office. He read it aloud to us, and then inquired, pathetically, "Isn't that poem all right?"

It was more than "all right." It was a delicate, imaginative bit of verse, descriptive of the young bride kneeling reverently in the nursery of her new home and praying that God would make her a good mother to the sleeping stepchildren. It was a real poem — such a poem as poor, gifted Irish Jack Moran could write, but only when the mood was upon him, for he was not one of those makers of verse who go to work at six in the morning with their dinner-pails.

"Ah, Jack!" exclaimed a sympathizing poet, "you never should have taken it to the *Ledger*. Didn't you know that Bonner was down on stepmothers? Change it round so as to make the step-

mother a beast, and he'll give you ten for it."

"By the way, Jack, do you remember the time there was a death in the old man's family, and we all got in on him with poems about meeting on the further shore and crossing the dark river?"

"I do," replied Jack, briefly. "It was worth just twenty to me."

And why was Bonner "down" on stepmothers? Simply because he wished to avoid giving offense to those who disapproved of second marriages, and who formed a very large part of his constituency.

I hope that I have thrown sufficient pathos into my description of the condition of the poor rhymester of a dozen or fifteen years ago to touch the hearts of my sympathetic readers. How much better off, you say, is the literary man of today, who makes steady wages in Franklin Square, or occupies one of the neat white

cottages erected for the employees of the McClure Steam Syndicate Mills in Paterson!

Better off in some respects, perhaps, dear reader, but in others his state is none the more gracious than it was in the days when Jack Moran's "Stepmother's Prayer" was rejected because Bonner was down on stepmothers. The great *Ledger* editor has retired to his stock-farm, but the principles which have enabled him to possess a stock-farm still live in every magazine office in the land, and the writer of to-day must be just as careful in regard to forbidden topics as his predecessor was, and, moreover, must keep his eye on three or four editors, with their likes and their dislikes.

But these remarks are not made in a carping spirit. There is some good reason for every one of these likes and dislikes. If Mr. Gilder prefers oatmeal to wheaten grits as a breakfast-table dish

for the hero of the new *Century* serial, it is because he has an eye on his Scotch subscribers; and if the manuscript of *Robinson Crusoe* is returned to Mr. De Foe with the remark that "Burlingame is down on goats," it is simply because *Scribner's Magazine* is not pushing its sale in Harlem and Williamsburg.

In regard to the practice of cutting an idea into eight pieces and serving up each piece as a separate poem or story, can any one familiar with current literature deny that ideas are just as much cut up now as they ever were? More than that, have not some of our writers solved the old problem of making bricks without straw? Why, then, you ask, is their manuscript printed in preference to matter that is more virile and fresh and readable? For the same reason that Jack Moran's "Stepmother's Prayer" was returned to him by the very hand that was stretched forth in glad eagerness to grasp

the sixteen poems that had sprung from the solitary idea of the two country brothers. Why, I know of one or two poets whose verses enjoy the widest sort of publicity, and who, I am sure, cut an idea into thirty-two pieces instead of sixteen.

CHAPTER III.

SOMETHING ABOUT "GOOD BAD STUFF."

"BONNER is down on stepmothers!" "All *Ledger* horses must be called Dobbin, and there is a heavy fine for driving them through a poem or serial faster than a walk, or, at best, a slow trot!" "Don't write anything about cousins marrying unless you want to have them back on your hands again!" These were a few of the beacon-lights that shone on the literary pathway of twenty years ago, and I know of more than one successful writer whose early footsteps were guided by the great artistic principles first laid down by Robert Bonner and religiously followed by the makers of prose and verse who

brought their wares to him every Friday morning. But poor Jack Moran did not live to become a successful writer. He dropped out of the ranks just as the rest of us were passing the quarter-post, but it was the first hurdle that really did for him. I have often thought that if Jack had taken his friend's advice and "changed his poem round so as to make the stepmother a beast," he might have lived to fill a responsible position in the Franklin Square Prose and Verse Foundry, or at the Eagle Verse Works in Jersey City. But Jack was a poet, and therefore did not know how to "change his poem round," and besides he hated to go to work every morning with his dinner-pail in his hand, and there were cakes and ale in Bohemia in those days for such as he.

As for the poet who tried to guide Jack's footsteps in the path that led to fame, he is alive to-day, and a highly

esteemed member of the guild. Indeed, a more industrious, sober, or thrifty man of letters never put on a pair of overalls or crossed the North River in the early morning boat with a basket of poems, jokes, and stories on his arm.

One Friday morning, many years ago, I went with this poet to the *Ledger* building, and there found half a dozen writers gathered together in an outer office, anxiously watching the dark shadow of a man that was thrown upon a partition of ground glass that extended from floor to ceiling across the room and separated it from the private office of the great editor.

The dark moving shadow on which every eye was fixed was that of Robert Bonner himself, and as it was seen to cross the room to a remote corner—growing smaller and fainter as it receded—every face brightened with hope, and forms that had seemed bent and de-

jected but a moment before were suddenly straightened. An instant later the door opened and the editor of the *Ledger* crossed the threshold, handed a ten-dollar bill to one of the waiting poets, and then hastily retired to his own den again.

Then my friend showed me how the watchers could tell by the movements of the dark shade whether a poem had been accepted or refused. If the editor walked from his desk to the remote corner of his private office they knew that he did it in order to place a poem in the drawer of an old bureau in which he kept the accepted manuscript; but if, on the other hand, he came directly to the door a horrible feeling of anxiety came into every mind, and each poet uttered a silent prayer—while his heart literally stood still within him—that the blow might fall on some head other than his own.

On this occasion my friend received ten dollars for his poem entitled "When

the Baby Smiled," and in the fullness of his heart he invited the author of the rejected verses on "Resignation"—who, by the way, was uttering the most horrible curses as he descended the staircase—to join us in a drink.

It was on this occasion, also, as I distinctly remember, that my friend the poet put the whole trade of letters in a nutshell:

"There are plenty of people," he remarked, "who can write good good stuff, but there are not many who can write good bad stuff. Here's one of those 'Two Brothers' poems I told you about, and if that isn't good bad stuff, I'd like to know what is." He handed me a printed copy of the poem, and I can still recall the first verses of it:

> Herbert to the city went,
> Though as sturdy was his arm
> As plain Tom's, who, quite content,
> Stayèd at home upon the farm.

Herbert wore a broadcloth coat,
Thomas wore the homespun gray;
Herbert on display did dote,
Thomas labored every day.

These lines have clung to my memory during many changing years, and I quote them now with undimmed admiration as almost the best example of "good bad stuff" that our literature possesses. And if the lines compel our regard, what must be our respect for the genius which could extract sixteen ten-dollar poems from the one primitive idea of the two rustic brothers?

The bard who penned these deathless stanzas has progressed with the times, and now writes many a poem for the *Century* and *Scribner's*, but I never see his name in one of the great monthlies without thinking of the days when he used to sit in the outer office of the *Ledger*, with half a dozen of his contemporaries, wondering whether he would get a ten-

dollar bill or his rejected poem when Mr. Bonner came out to separate the chaff from the wheat.

Some of my readers may wonder what became of all the poetry that was rejected by Mr. Bonner, and to these I would reply that it was seldom, indeed, that any literary matter—either in prose or in verse—was allowed to go to waste. The market was not as large then as it is now, and a serious poem could "make the rounds" in a very short time. If it failed as a serious effort it was an easy matter for a practical poet to add to it what was called a "comic snapper," by virtue of which it could be offered to *Puck* or *Wild Oats*.

For instance, a poet of my acquaintance once told me that he wrote a poem about "Thrifty Tom," as he called him, who insured his life for a large sum of money, paid the premiums for two or three years, and then died, leaving his

wife and children comfortably provided for. Now it happened that the great Scotch editor did not believe in life-insurance as an investment—the *Ledger* published no advertisements of any description in those days, so he was enabled to view the matter with an unbiased mind—and therefore he declined the verses, not wishing to promote the interests of a scheme which he could not indorse. And straightway the poet sate himself down and gave to his stanzas a comic snapper which told how "Idle Bill" proceeded to court and marry the widow, and passed the remainder of his days in the enjoyment of the money which the thrifty one had struggled so hard to lay aside for his family. In its new form the poem was sold to *Puck*, and the word went out to all the makers of prose and verse that Bonner was "down on life-insurance."

Is there any demand for "good bad stuff" nowadays?

There is an almost limitless demand for it, and there always will be, provided the gas-fitters and the paper-hangers and the intelligent and highly cultivated American women continue to exert the influence in the field of letters that they do to-day.

The "good bad stuff" of the present era is printed on supercalendered paper, and illustrated, in many instances, with pictures that are so much better than the text that it is difficult to comprehend how even the simplest observer can fail to notice the contrast. Moreover the good bad stuff of to-day commands much higher prices than were ever paid during the *Ledger* period, and it is not infrequently signed with some name which has been made familiar to the public ear —if only by mere force of constant reiteration—and is therefore supposed to possess a peculiar value of its own. Nevertheless it is good bad stuff all the same,

and can be recognized as such by those whose eyes are too strong to be blinded by the glare from the pictures and the great big literary name.

Don't understand me to say that there is no good prose or verse to be found on those highly glazed, beautifully printed pages to which we of the present generation of readers turn for our literary refreshment. On the contrary, the modern magazines give us so much that is admirable, so many thoughtful essays and descriptive articles, that one wonders only why so much of the fiction which they offer should be of such poor calibre.

But the editors and publishers of the great monthlies know what they are about as well as Mr. Bonner ever did, and they know, too, the immense value of the good bad stuff which they serve to their patrons in such tempting and deceptive forms.

CHAPTER IV.

THE EARLY HOLLAND PERIOD.

WHEN, near the close of the year 1870, Dr. J. G. Holland started *Scribner's Monthly*, American letters entered upon a new stage of its development. The literary field was then occupied by the poets, humorists, and essayists of the Pfaff school, dwelling under the perpetual shadow of the Bonnerian maxims, and the occasional one of pecuniary depression; also a few men of the James Parton type who knew not Bohemia, and women writers like Mrs. Dallas.

It must be remembered that at this time no signatures were allowed in the Harpers' publications, and the matter

published in the *Monthly* was either of foreign manufacture or else prepared in the Franklin Square Foundry by poets employed by the week at fair but not exorbitant wages. The *Ledger* principles were observed here to a certain extent, but were not enforced as rigidly as they were by Mr. Bonner in his own establishment. I think, myself, that the Pfaff poets were more directly accountable for the introduction of the Bonnerian maxims than were the Harpers themselves, because they had become so accustomed to eliminate stepmothers, sisters, fast trotters, and other objectionable features from their work that they had come to regard them as quite as much outside the pale of ordinary fiction as if they were dwellers on the planet Mars. Moreover a poem or story constructed on the Bonner plan might, if rejected by the Harpers, still prove acceptable to the *Ledger*.

From the very first Dr. Holland showed

a commendable purpose to raise the tone of the new *Monthly* above that of Mr. Bonner's story-paper, and although we see distinct evidences, in his earlier numbers, of *Ledger* influences, it was not long before a gradual emancipation from the strictest and most literal interpretation of Mr. Bonner's iron-clad rules began. Horses soon began to strike a swifter gait in the serial stories, and in "Wilfred Cumbermede" one of these quadrupeds has the hardihood to throw its rider over its head. But that would never have happened if George Macdonald had been trained in the modern *Ledger* school of fiction.

Looking over these old numbers in the light of ripened knowledge, I can see Dr. Holland slowly groping his way along an untrodden pathway leading from the *Ledger* office to the broad fields of literature, where our magazine barons hold undisputed sway. That he kept a watchful

eye on his rural subscribers is shown by an extended illustrated article on Fairmount Park, and another one descriptive of Philadelphia—subjects which possess about as much interest for metropolitan readers as that masterpiece of bucolic romance, *The Opening of a Chestnut Burr*. Among the writers whose names appear in these numbers are Alice Cary, Edward Eggleston, J. T. Headley, and Washington Gladden—all graduates or disciples of the great *Ledger* school.

Of these I consider Washington Gladden entitled to the highest rank as an exponent of mediocrity. Indeed, after a careful survey of the magazine barons' wide domain, I must award the palm of merit to this popular manufacturer of literary wares for even mediocrity, unspoiled by the slightest sense of humor. It is that very lack of humor which has brought success to many a man whose mission in life has been to write for the

great, simple-minded public. The poets and humorists of the Jack Moran school, who were compelled to descend to the commonplace and the stupid because of their temporal necessities, never really became thorough masters of the divine art of writing mediocrity, because their sense of the ludicrous brought them to a halt before those Alpine heights of tedious imbecility which people like E. P. Roe and Washington Gladden scaled with unblanched cheeks.

But to return to Washington Gladden. If any of the large and thoughtful circle whom I have the honor to address have never read a story from this gentleman's pen, entitled *The Christian League of Connecticut*, I implore them to seek out the numbers of the *Century* in which it appeared about a decade ago, and sit down to the enjoyment of one of the finest specimens of unconscious humor that our generation has known.

This story deals with a league composed of all the Protestant churches in a small Connecticut town, for the promotion of large-hearted geniality and mutual aid in the work of evangelization. It contains a description of a scene in the Methodist Church at the moment when it seems that the congregation will be unable to raise the debt which has long weighed them down. They are about to abandon the attempt, when the other churches in the town learn of their distress and proceed to help them out. The First Congregational Church pledges $1675, the Universalist Church sends $500, and finally the Second Congregational Church raises the ante to $1810, while the people burst forth into shouts of "Hallelujah!" and fervent songs of praise.

If any one were to write a wild burlesque on the ecclesiastical methods in vogue in Connecticut he would fall far

short of Mr. Gladden's account of this extraordinary meeting. The New England country parson who gets his salary regularly is a fortunate man, and as to subscriptions for the church, they are usually collected with the aid of a stomach-pump. I have never yet heard of a man giving anything toward any church save that in which he had a pew, but I do remember the scene which ensued one morning in a little country meeting-house, when the richest man in the congregation relaxed his grip on three hundred dollars—and there was a string tied to every bill, too.

Another chapter of *The Christian League* tells us how Judge Beeswax returned to his native village from the city in which he had grown wealthy, and generously gave a thousand dollars to save the old church, in which he had worshiped as a boy, from being sold for old timber.

And this *dénouement* bears such a won-

derful resemblance to that in eight of the sixteen "Two Brothers" poems that I am half inclined to suspect that in his younger days Mr. Gladden was one of the poets who turned up at the *Ledger* office every Friday and waited for the verdict.

And I am sure that Dr. Holland had been, in his time, a close student of the Bonnerian maxims, and especially of that which I have already alluded to—"In real life, yes; but not in the *New York Ledger!*" To which might be added, "nor in the old *Scribner's* either." All through the Holland period we find evidences of the deep hold that this maxim had taken on the minds of both writers and barons.

For example, I believe that it is pretty well known that extreme prohibition measures bring about the most degrading and terrible forms of drunkenness known outside of Liverpool, and that of all the prohibitory statutes the Maine Liquor Law is about the worst. That is

the case in real life, but not in *Scribner's Monthly*, for in the year 1877—Dr. Holland being then the dominant figure in American letters—we find in an article on the Rangeley Lakes the following paragraph: "The Maine Liquor Law has certainly put an end to this *régime* (a barrel of rum to a barrel of beans), and with it have disappeared to a very great extent drunkenness, profanity, and kindred vices."

Yes, my carping friend, we all know that the sentence which I have quoted is ridiculously untrue, and entirely out of place in a very interesting article on trout-fishing, but there was just as good a reason for printing it as there was for publishing *The Christian League of Connecticut.* That paragraph was well calculated to please folks of the variety that swooped down upon New York thirty thousand strong, under the banner of the Christian Endeavor Society.

I do not know why it is, but people of this class fairly revel in humbug of every description, and nothing pleases them more than to read about the beneficent influences of prohibitory legislation, or to swallow once more the old Anglo-Saxon lie about Albion's virtue and the wickedness of France—and if you would like to see that miserable fallacy whacked in the head read Mr. Brownell's *French Traits*—or even to gloat over Mr. Gladden's story of the princely generosity that prevails in the religious circles of New England.

These Christian Endeavor people are a mystery to me. More than thirty thousand of them took possession of our city, and there was one erring brother among them who fell by the wayside, and was locked up in the House of Detention, charged with having been robbed of his return-ticket and about two hundred dollars in money. He was confined nearly a week, and during that time not

one of his fellow Christian Endeavorers held out a helping hand to him. If the unfortunate man had come on from the West to attend a convention of sneak-thieves he would have fared better than he did.

"But what have the Christian Endeavorers to do with literature?" asks my doubting and critical friend. They have a great deal to do with literature just now, more's the pity. I did not drag them into these pages by the neck and ears simply to say what I thought of them (although I am not sorry to do that), but to give my audience an idea of one of the elements—and it is a large one, too—to which our magazine publishers are obliged to cater, if they wish to hold their own in point of circulation.

It is because of just such people as these that our periodical literature is constantly defaced by matter of the sort that I have mentioned, and we are all the

time saying, just as Bonner said to the Pfaff poet, "It's one thing in real life, but another in *Harper's* and the *Century*." So it happens that intelligent human beings must have their nostrils assailed with rubbish about the Maine Liquor Law putting a stop to profanity, because, forsooth, it is supposed to tickle the palates of a lot of sniveling humbugs, who are so busy with prayers and psalm-singing that they have not time to perform the commonest acts of decency and charity for one of their own kith and kin.

Understand me, I am not blaming the barons for putting stuff of this sort into their publications. If I were the proprietor of a great magazine I would have a picture of Robert Bonner over my desk, and the walls of my editorial rooms and business offices should be hung with the great *Ledger* maxims. There are a thousand mediocre people in this country to where there are five of superior intelli-

gence; but, after all, the five have *some* rights that magazine barons are bound to respect, and I think that about Christmas-time every year some little attention ought to be shown them.

CHAPTER V.

MENDACITY DURING THE HOLLAND PERIOD OF LETTERS.

THE Holland age of letters may be said to have extended over the eighth decade of this century, and that it was an era of change and progress can be readily seen by a glance at the periodical literature of the seventies.

It is during this era, however, that we find indications of a deplorable tendency on the part of the good doctor to pander to the prejudices of the gas-fitter and the paper-hanger element, by the publication of stories and articles which were either spurious as literature or else absolutely mendacious as to the facts which they

recorded and the scenes which they described.

Of course I do not pretend that literary mendacity began under Dr. Holland, for the *Ledger* school was a highly imaginative one, at best; but the vein of untruth which is found cropping out from time to time during the eighth decade has proved infinitely more harmful to modern literature than were the lurid and confessedly improbable tales of bandits and haunted castles and splendid foreign noblemen which found so many eager readers a score of years ago. The aristocratic circles of English society which were enlivened by the nebulous presence of Lady Chetwynde's spectre were so far removed from those in which the spellbound haymaker, who read about them, had his being that it made very little difference to him — or to literary art either — whether they were truthfully portrayed or not; but the mendacious and meretricious

literature which we find in the Holland period is more pretentious in its imitation of truth, and therefore all the more dangerous.

It was within a year after the first number of *Scribner's* had been issued that Dr. Holland began the publication of a series of papers, afterward printed in book form, which deserve special mention here because they are so thoroughly characteristic of the period in which they saw the light. They are known to the world as *Back-log Studies*, and the average reader of ordinary intelligence will tell you that Mr. Warner's book is "delightful reading," that he possesses a "dainty style," and that his studies of the open fireplace are "fresh, original, and altogether charming."

Now did you ever happen to read *The Reveries of a Bachelor?* If you did you will admit that there was very little left in an open fire when Ik Marvel got

through with it; and if you have also read *Back-log Studies* in the conscientious, critical way in which all books should be read, then you will agree with me in my opinion that Mr. Warner found very little to say about it that had not already been much better said by Marvel.

The book is neither fresh nor original nor charming, but it imitates those qualities so artistically and successfully that it has won for itself a unique place in the literature of a period in which the *Ledger* and the Holland schools of fiction may be said to have struggled for the supremacy.

I do not call *Back-log Studies* mendacious. They are merely imitative, and deserve mention here only because they were put together with so much cleverness that nearly the whole of the reading public has been deluded into believing them wholly original and of a high order of merit.

In a previous chapter I have cited certain glaring examples of mendacity that occurred during the Holland period; but none of them deserves to rank, in point of barefaced and unscrupulous perversion of facts, with Abbott's *Life of Napoleon Bonaparte*, published in *Harper's Magazine* years before Dr. Holland became the leading figure in American letters, which he was during the seventies. Nor should we lose sight of the fact that the present literary age has given birth to no end of stories and novels and descriptive articles which are disgracefully mendacious in color, fact, and sentiment.

But if you, my dear reader, would like to see a descriptive article which is absolutely matchless in point of mendacity and asinine incompetency, turn to the June *Scribner's* of 1875—the very middle of the Holland age—and read what a certain Mr. Rhodes has to say about the Latin Quarter of Paris. I suppose the

whole world does not contain a corner that offers so much that is picturesque, fascinating, interesting — in short, so well worth writing about — as the Quartier Latin in the French capital.

At the time this article was printed there were dozens of clever young men — Bohemians, poets, and humorists of the class that used to gather in Pfaff's of a Saturday night to make merry with the "tenner" received the day before for a *Ledger* poem entitled "Going Home to Mother" or "Be Prepared; Bow to the Will Divine." I doubt if we have to-day young men better equipped for the task of describing the student life of Paris than were those who dwelt in our own Bohemia in 1875. But the conductors of *Scribner's Monthly* passed them by and intrusted the work to this Albert Rhodes, concerning whom history is silent, but who seems to have been more incompetent and more unworthy of his great op-

portunity than any human being on the face of the earth.

What shall we say of a man who quotes one of the best things in the *Scènes de la Vie de Bohême* and then blandly remarks that he does not see anything funny in it?

That is precisely what Mr. Rhodes does. He prints the program of the soirée given by Rodolphe and Marcel, and then observes, with the solemnity of a Central Park pelican: "There is nothing very humorous in this, as will be observed, and yet it may be regarded as one of the best specimens of Murger's *genre*."

Well, I can inform Mr. Rhodes, and also the simple-minded folk who believed in him because he wrote for the magazines, that if that chapter of the *Vie de Bohême* is not funny, there is nothing funny in the world. It begins with the "opening of the salons and entry and promenade of the witty authors of the

Mountain in Labor, a comedy rejected by the Odéon Théâtre," and closes with the significant warning that "persons attempting to read or recite poetry will be cast into outer darkness."

The gifted Mr. Rhodes was probably in doubt as to the humor of this passage because it is not prefixed with "Our friend K—— sends the 'Drawer' the following good one," and because its point is not indicated by italics after the fashion of humor of the *Ayer's Almanac* school; but he can rest assured that that brief quotation from Murger is the funniest thing in his essay, always excepting his own bovine lack of perception. It is particularly funny to me because I have sometimes witnessed the "entry and promenade" through the salons of the witty authors of stories that have been accepted by magazines—a spectacle calculated to produce prolonged and hilarious merriment—and I have often wished

that the recitation clause in the Bohemian's program could be enforced in every house in the town.

I have devoted a good deal of space to this long-forgotten article because it is a fair sample of the sort of stuff that is offered to us from time to time, prepared especially for us, like so much baby's food, by men and women who are carefully selected by the magazine barons, and who generally rival Mr. Rhodes in point of simian incompetence and utter lack of all appreciative or perceptive qualities.

But let us turn from the awful spectacle of Mr. Rhodes standing like a lone penguin in the very midst of the Latin Quarter of Paris, and wailing mournfully about the poor girl who "sometimes compels the young man to marry her." A far brighter picture is that presented by the distinguished English gentleman who, having won the highest distinction with his pencil, takes up his pen with the air

of one who is enjoying a holiday fairly earned by a lifetime of toil, and portrays the real Quartier Latin of the Second Empire with a humor that makes us think of Henri Murger, and with a delicacy of touch, a human sympathy, and a tendency to turn aside and moralize that place him very near to Thackeray.

If you wish to read a story which is at once human, truthful, and interesting, read George Du Maurier's "Trilby," and note the skill with which he has caught the very essence of the spirit of student life, preserved it for a third of a century, and then given it to us in all its freshness, and with the fire of an artistic youth blended with the philosophy and worldly knowledge that belong only to later life.

To read "Trilby" is to open a box in which some rare perfume has been kept for thirty odd years, and to drink in the fragrance that is as pervading and strong and exquisite as ever.

And while we are enjoying this charming story, let us not forget to give thanks to the Harpers for the courage which they have shown in publishing it, for if there is anything calculated to injure them in the eyes of the gas-fitters and paper-hangers it is a novel in which the truth is told in the high-minded, cleanly, and straightforward fashion in which Mr. Du Maurier tells it here. Fancy the feelings of a Christian Endeavorer—the modern prototype of the Levite who passed by on the other side—on finding in a publication of the sort which he has always found as soothing to his prejudices and hypocrisy and pet meannesses as the purring of a cat on a warm hearthstone—fancy the feelings of such an one as he finds the mantle of charity thrown over the sins and weaknesses of the erring, suffering, exquisitely human Latin Quarter model.

One need not read more than a single

instalment of "Trilby" to realize that its author never learned the trade of letters in either the *Ledger* primary school or the Dr. Holland academy, for there is scarcely a chapter that does not fairly teem with matter that has long been forbidden in all well-regulated magazine offices, and I know that a great many experienced manufacturers of and dealers in serial fiction believe that it marks a new era in literature.

But to return to our sheep—and in the case of Mr. Rhodes the word is an apt one—why was that article about the Latin Quarter of Paris published?

Perhaps some of my readers think it was that the Scribner people did not know any better, or because Mr. Rhodes belonged to that "ring of favored contributors" of which one hears so much in certain artistic circles. In reply, let me say that the "ring of favored contributors" is a myth, or at least I have never

been able to find reasonable proof of its existence. Magazine editors buy exactly what they consider suitable for their readers, and they buy from whoever offers what they want. If they allowed themselves to be influenced by their small personal likes and dislikes the whole literary system which they have reared would go to pieces, and some dialect-writers that I wot of would be "back on the old farm," like the slick chaps in eight of the "Two Brothers" poems.

As for the Scribner editors "not knowing any better," let none be deceived. They have always known a great deal more than their rejected contributors gave them credit for, and there was a distinct and vital reason for every important step that they took in building up the magnificent property now known the world over as the *Century Magazine*. Personally I have the highest confidence in the wisdom of the magazine barons.

If a barbed-wire fence is stretched across a certain pasture it is with a purpose as definite and rational as that which led Mr. Bonner to reject Jack Moran's "Stepmother's Prayer" and pay $160 for the sixteen poems about the two brothers.

No; there was something in this article that made it valuable for magazine purposes. It was well calculated to please those who revel in that sniveling Anglo-Saxon hypocrisy and humbug about British virtue and the wickedness of the French people. Mr. Rhodes was employed by Dr. Holland because he was probably the only living creature who could stand on the spot from which has come so much that has made the world brighter and better and happier, and utter his silly platitudes about "young men draining the cup of pleasure to the dregs." I say that the editor of *Scribner's* had just as good a reason for publishing the Quartier

Latin essay as Mr. Bonner had for being "down on stepmothers" and refusing all poems that treated of them: *Dr. Holland was down on grisettes.*

CHAPTER VI.

THE DAWN OF THE JOHNSONIAN PERIOD.

When the good Dr. Holland passed away, his mantle descended upon the shoulders of Mr. R. U. Johnson, the foremost of his disciples, and one who had literally sat at the feet of the great master of the eighth decade of the present century, and learned from his lips the deathless principles of modern magazine editing. Since then Mr. Johnson has, in his capacity of associate editor of the *Century Magazine*, so skillfully blended the methods of the canny Scotch *Ledger* editor with those of Dr. Holland that he has not only kept his own periodical well in the lead, but has also set the pace for

American literature and compelled his rivals to watch his movements at all times with the closest care, and frequently to imitate him.

I first heard of the existence of Mr. Johnson, who is unquestionably the one dominant figure in American literature of to-day, about fourteen years ago, just as I was beginning to learn something about the trade of writing. I had placed in the hands of a literary friend—now well known as one of the most successful of the modern school of story-writers—the manuscript of a story which dealt with the criminal life of the lower east side of the town, and was wondering how soon I was to awake and find myself famous when my manuscript was returned to me with a brief note from my friend, in which he said:

"I read your story through yesterday, and was so much pleased with it that my first impulse was to take it to the *Century*

Magazine. Indeed, I would have done so had I not remembered at that moment that Johnson does not like low life; so you had better try one of the daily papers."

"*Johnson does not like low life!*"

That was encouraging news for a young man who believed that literary methods had not materially altered since the days when Oliver Goldsmith wrote *The Vicar of Wakefield.*

The pen fell from my hand—it happened to be employed just then on a story dealing with life in a Pell Street opium-joint—and I said to myself: "Merciful heavens! must I devote my life to the delineation of what are called society types, simply because Johnson—whoever he may be—does not like low life?"

I think that if I had known then that low life was only one of a thousand things that could not meet the approval of Johnson, and that, moreover, Bonner was down on fast horses, stepmothers, sisters, matri-

monial cousins, and brindle-pups, I would have thrown down my pen and endeavored to support myself in some other way.

But I did not know anything about the practical side of literature then, so I blundered on, wasting a great deal of time over forbidden topics, until I made the acquaintance of Jack Moran and others of his school, who welcomed me to Bohemia, and generously bade me share their treasure-house of accrued knowledge of editorial likes and dislikes. My low-life story—in my sublime faith I had written it on the flimsiest sort of paper—traveled from one office to another until it had eaten up $1.28 in postage and looked like Prince Lorenzo in the last act of *The Mascot*. Then, held together by copper rivets, it sank into its grave in the old daily *Truth*, unwept and unsigned.

I came across this forgotten offspring of my literary youth not long ago, and

candor compels me to say that if Mr. Johnson had read that story and printed it in the *Century Magazine* he would not be to-day the dominant figure in the literature of our country that he is. My romance was not nearly as good as a great many that I have read in daily papers from the pens of clever newspaper men who know what they are writing about. In point of intense dramatic interest it was not within a thousand miles of the *Sun's* masterly history of the career of George Howard, the bank burglar, who was murdered in the Westchester woods about fifteen years ago. The story of Howard's life and crimes was told in a page of the *Sun*, I think by Mr. Amos Cummings, and if I could find any fiction equal to it in one of our magazines I would gladly sound the praises of the editor who was courageous enough to publish it.

I can afford to smile now as I recall

the bitterness of spirit in which I used to chafe under the restrictions imposed upon us by the all-powerful barons of literature. I used to console my wounded vanity then by picturing to myself a bright future, when Johnson would stretch out his hands to me and beg me to place on the tip of his parched tongue a few pages of my cooling and invigorating manuscript. And with what derision would I have laughed then had any one told me that in the years to come I would be the one to accord to Mr. Johnson the honor which is his just due, and to recognize the wisdom which he showed in rejecting my story of low life!

A truthful portrayal of life among the criminal and vicious classes would be as much out of place in the *Century Magazine* as one depicting the love of a widower for his own cousin, whom he took out to ride behind a horse with a record of 2.53, would have been in the old *Ledger;*

and I am positive that such a thing will not occur until after the close of the present literary dynasty.

There is an excellent reason for this prohibition, too. There are no people in the world who have a greater horror of what they consider "low" or "vulgar" than those who are steeped in mediocrity, and who, in this country, form a large part of the reading public. In England they are known as the "lower middle classes," and they exist in countless thousands; but they have a literature of their own—Ouida, the *Family Herald*, *Ally Sloper's 'Alf 'Oliday*,—and writers like George Meredith and Mrs. Humphry Ward and George Du Maurier pay no attention to them or to their prejudices. Nor does it seem to me that these writers are as grievously hampered by consideration for the peachy cheek of the British young person as they claim to be.

The fact that Johnson was down on low

life made a deep impression on me, not so much because of what, I must admit, is a most reasonable and proper prejudice, but because I soon found that every literary man of my acquaintance was fully aware of his feelings in the matter, and therefore took pains not to introduce into a story any scenes or characters which might serve to render the manuscript unsalable in the eyes of the *Century* editors; and as years rolled on I could not help noticing the effect which this and other likes and dislikes of this literary Gessler had in moulding the fiction of our day and generation. And it is because of this *Century* taboo, which had its origin in the *Ledger* office, by the way, that I know of hardly a single magazine writer of today who has made himself familiar with the great wealth of varied material which may be found in that section of New York which it is the custom to refer to vaguely as "the great east side."

It was not very long after the receipt of the letter which thrust upon my bewildered senses a nebulous comprehension of Mr. Johnson's influence and importance in the domain of letters that a fuller recognition of his omniscience was wrung from me, all-admiring, yet loath to believe. Mr. H. C. Bunner had written a story called "The Red Silk Handkerchief" and sent it to the *Century* office for approval. The story contained a graphic description of the flagging of a train to avert a disaster, in which occurred the following passage:

". . . and he stood by the platform of the last car as the express stopped.

"There was a crowd around Horace in an instant. His head was whirling; but, in a dull way, he said what he had to say. An officious passenger, who would have explained it all to the conductor if the conductor had waited, took the deliverer in his arms—for the boy was near faint-

ing—and enlightened the passengers who flocked around.

"Horace hung in his embrace, too deadly weak even to accept the offer of one of the dozen flasks that were thrust at him."

Now an ignorant layman will, I am bound, find nothing in the quoted sentences that could possibly give offense to the most sensitive reader; but it was precisely at the point where the quotation ends that the finely trained and ever-alert editorial sense of Mr. Johnson told him of the danger that lurked in the author's apparently innocuous phrase.

"Hold on!" he cried; "can't you make it two or three flasks instead of a dozen?"

Well did the keen-witted Johnson know that to many a serious-minded gas-fitter or hay-maker the spectacle of a dozen evil-minded and evil-living men riding roughshod through the pages of a

family periodical and over the feelings of its readers would be distasteful in the extreme, if not absolutely shocking. Two or three flasks would lend to the scene a delicate suggestion of the iniquity of the world, just enough to make them thank God that they were not as other men are; but a dozen was altogether too much for them, and Johnson was the man who knew it.

It is only fair to add that the author very properly refused to alter his manuscript, and the story stands, to-day, as it was originally written.

It was the flask episode that really opened my eyes to the peculiar conditions which encompassed the modern trade of letters, clogging the feet of the laborers thereof, and, while making the easy declivities about Parnassus accessible to every one who could hold a pen, rendering its upper heights more difficult to reach than they ever were before. And

it was the same episode which finally proved to me Mr. Johnson's leadership in contemporaneous literature — a leadership which he has held from that day to this by sheer force of his intimate knowledge of the tastes, prejudices, and peculiarities of the vast army of readers which the *Century Magazine* has gathered unto itself, and still holds by the closest of ties, and will hold, in my opinion, so long as Mr. Johnson remains at the helm, with his pruning-hook in his hand, and reading, with clear, searching eyes, the innermost thoughts of his subscribers.

The present literary era has given us many things to be thankful for, chief among which should be mentioned the enormous advance in the art of illustration — a blessing which is shadowed only by the regretful knowledge that literature has not kept pace with her sister art. Indeed, too high praise cannot be given to the proprietors of the great monthlies for

the liberality and good taste which they have shown in raising the pictorial standard of their publications to its present high plane, from which it commands the admiration of all right-minded people. And if we are living in the Johnsonian age of letters we are also living in the Frazeresque period of art, for I doubt if any one man has exercised a wider influence in the field of modern illustration than Mr. W. L. Fraser, the maker of the art department of the *Century*. Nor should we forget his associate, Mr. Drake.

To the present literary era we are indebted, also, for the higher development of that peculiar form of fiction called the short story, the popularity of which has at least served to give employment to a large number of worthy people who would otherwise have been compelled to eke out an existence by humbler and more exhausting forms of labor. No sooner had the short-story fever taken

possession of the magazine offices than there appeared from various corners of the earth men, women, and children, many of whom had never written anything before in their lives, but who now besieged the Franklin and Union Square strongholds, bearing in their inky hands manuscript which in many instances they were fortunate enough to dispose of, to the rage and wonder of those old-timers who, having learned their trade under Mr. Bonner and Dr. Holland, now found themselves too old to readily fall in with the new order of things.

Of this new brood a few were chosen, and among them were the writers of dialect stories, which enjoyed an astonishing vogue for several years, and are now, happily enough, losing ground. I think the banner writer of dialect stories of this period was a certain Mr. William McLellan, who contributed a number of unique specimens of his wares to *Harper's Month-*

ly. He could spell more words wrong than any other writer I ever heard of, and I have often wished that I could read one of his stories.

Some of these short-story marvels have been extremely successful, and now take rank as first-class writers of fiction. I would have a much higher regard for them, though, if they could write novels —not serials, but novels.

Among other notable products of the fecund Johnsonian age the future historian of American literature will dwell upon the *Century* war-papers, well calculated to extend the circulation of the magazine over vast areas in the South as well as the North where it had been almost unknown before; the Siberian experiences of Mr. George Kennan; autobiographies of celebrated men and women; and idyllic phases of New England life from the pen of the inimitable Mr. Gladden.

The Kennan articles were of enormous

value, apart from their own intrinsic merit, because their purpose was the reform of certain abuses. We Americans are so fond of reform that we are always getting it in one shape or another, and the more we get of it the more we want; and these papers were aimed only at the Czar of Russia and his advisers — men who neither subscribe for nor advertise in American monthlies. I doubt if a proposition to undertake a crusade against plumbers and compel them to lower their prices would awaken a tidal wave of enthusiasm in the *Century* office.

CHAPTER VII.

WOMAN'S INFLUENCE IN THE JOHNSONIAN PERIOD.

It seems to me that so long as a literary man can hold a pen in his hand there is no danger of his going to the poorhouse; for when he becomes too old to give satisfaction as a reporter, or too prosy and stupid to write essays on "The Probable Outcome of the Briggs Controversy" for the religious journals, he can always find a purchaser for a series of *Letters to a Young Man on the Threshold of Life*, and the sillier the letters the greater will be their success.

I have read dozens of books of this sort, and have often wondered at the uniform

ignorance and stupidity which characterized them. There was a time when I wondered who bought these books, for no young man on the threshold of life would be seen reading one of them. I know now that they are not written to suit the tastes of the young men themselves, but of the old grannies who will buy one at Christmas-time as a present for Bob or Tom or Bill.

They are compiled either by literary hacks, enfeebled clergymen, or women of limited intelligence, and they are artfully designed to ensnare the fancy of the simple-minded, the credulous, and the good. I have noticed that those which are plentifully supplied with texts from Holy Writ command the largest sale, provided, of course, the texts are printed in italics.

I believe that books of this description belong to what is known technically as the "awakening" class—that is to say, they are supposed to awaken a young man

to a sense of his own spiritual degradation. I cannot answer for their effect on very young men, but I do know that they awaken nothing in my heart but feelings of uproarious hilarity; for I well remember how the merry Bohemians who enriched the literature of the *Ledger* age with their contributions turned many an honest dollar by means of these admonitory letters, and not one of these priceless essays but contained its solemn preachment on the advantages to be derived from the companionship of good, pure women. But never a word was uttered in regard to the bad influence of good women.

Indeed, I can fancy nothing that would have been less in harmony with a literary spirit which denied recognition to stepmothers, fast horses, and amatory cousins than a vivid bit of realism of that sort; and as for the succeeding age, was not the good Dr. Holland himself the author of

the famous *Timothy Titcomb Papers?* It is even too bald a bit of truth for the more enlightened Johnsonian period in which we live. Nevertheless the recording angel has a heavy score rolled up against the sex which it was once the chivalrous fashion to liken to the clinging vine, but which, as some of us know, can clutch as well as cling—a sex which continues to distil the most deadly and enervating of intoxicants, the flattery of tongue and eye, by the same process that was known to Delilah and to Helen of Troy.

But although the latter-day process of distillation is undoubtedly the same that was employed in centuries long gone by the effects of the poison are by no means the same now that they were then. In the Homeric age it sent a man forth to do valiant if unnecessary deeds; but in the present era it slowly but surely robs the young writer of his originality, under-

mines his reputation, nips all healthy ambition in the bud, and leaves him a stranded wreck of whom men say contemptuously as they pass by: "Bad case of the Swelled Head." It may happen that some more thoughtful of the passers-by will have the grace to put the blame where it belongs by adding: "That young fellow was doing very well two years ago, and we all thought he was going to amount to something; but he fell in with a lot of silly women who flattered him and told him he was the greatest writer in the world. They swelled his head so that he could not write at all, and now he's of no use to himself or any one else."

But although these poor stranded human wrecks may be encountered in every large community I have yet to find a writer of advice to young men with sufficient courage, veracity, and conscience to utter a word of warning against the poison to which so many owe their fall.

In order that I may make clear my meaning in regard to the evil influences of good women let us imagine the unheard-of case of a young man who actually reads one of these books of advice to young men on life's threshold, and is sufficiently influenced by its teachings to seek the sort of female companionship which he is told will prove of such enduring benefit to him. This young man, we will say, is beginning his literary career in the very best possible way, as a reporter on a great morning newspaper. He is not a "journalist," nor a compiler of "special stories" (which the city editor always takes special pains to crowd out), nor is he "writing brevier" or "doing syndicate work." He is just a plain reporter of the common or garden kind; and very glad he is to be one, too, for he and his fellows know that the reporter wields the most influential pen in America in the present year of grace.

And every day this young man adds some new experience to the store of worldly knowledge which will be his sole capital in the profession which he has chosen. To-day the task of reporting the strike at the thread-mills gives him an insight into the condition of the working-classes such as was never possessed by the wiseacres who write so learnedly in the great quarterlies about the relation of labor to capital. To-morrow he will go down the Bay to interview some incoming foreign celebrity, and next week will find him in a distant city reporting a great criminal trial which engrosses the attention of the whole country. He is working hard and making a fair living, and, best of all, he is making steady progress every day in the profession of writing.

It is in the midst of this healthy, engrossing, and instructive life that he pauses to listen to the admonitory words of the Rev. Dr. Stuffe:

"Young man on life's threshold, seek the companionship of good women. Go into the society of cultivated and thoughtful people. You will be all the better for it!"

Whereupon the young man arrays himself in the finest attire at his command and goes up-town to call on certain family friends whom he has not seen for some years past. Within a short time he finds himself a regular frequenter of receptions, kettledrums, and evening parties, with dinners looming up on the horizon. He meets a number of charming young women, and cannot help noticing that they prefer his society to that of the other young men whom they know. These other young men are richer, better dressed, and, in many instances, better looking than our young friend from Park Row, but what does all that count for in the face of the fact that he has often been behind the scenes at the Metropolitan Opera-house,

and is personally acquainted with Ada Rehan or Ellen Terry?

He thinks that Dr. Stuffe was right when he advised him to go into society, and already he feels sure that he is deriving great benefit from it. But what he mistakes for a healthful stimulant is, in reality, the insidious poison against which the Reverend Stuffe has never a word of warning said; and, unless our young friend be strong enough to flee from it in time, he will find his feet straying from the rugged path which leads to true literary success, and which he has up to this moment been treading bravely and with ever-increasing self-confidence and knowledge.

"And so you're really a literary man! How nice that must be! Do tell me what *nom de plume* you write under!" some lovely girl will say to him, and then he will answer meekly that he does not sign either his name or his *nom de plume*, be-

cause he is working on a daily paper—if he has a mind as strong as Daniel Webster's he will say that he is a reporter—and then some of the light will fade out of the young girl's deep-blue eyes, and she will say "Oh!" and perhaps ask him if he doesn't think Mr. Janvier's story about the dead Philadelphia cat the funniest thing that he's seen in a long while. Then she will ask him compassionately why he does not write for the magazines like that delightful Mr. Inkhorn, who sometimes goes down on the Bowery with two detectives, and sits up as late as half-past eleven. Has he read Mr. Inkhorn's story, "Little Willie: A Tale of Mush and Milk"? It's perfectly delightful, and shows such a wonderful knowledge of New York!

At this point I would advise my young friend from Park Row to put cotton in his ears or turn the conversation into some other channel, because if the sweet young girl prattles on much longer he will find

that her literary standards of good and bad are very different from those of his editor-in-chief, whom he has been trying so hard to please, and of the clever, hard-working and hard-thinking young men with whom he is associated in both work and play. If she can inspire him with a desire to please her, he will have cause to bitterly regret the day that he first sought her society in obedience to the suggestion of Dr. Stuffe; for to accomplish this he must put away the teachings of his editor-in-chief, who has learned four languages in order that he may understand his own, and whose later years have been devoted to the task of instilling in the minds of his subordinates a fitting reverence for the purity and splendor of the Anglo-Saxon tongue.

It is precious little that the pure, refined young girl cares about good English, and she would be a rare one of her kind if she did not prefer it splattered with hybrid

French because it "sounds better." She has a far higher regard for the author who signs his name to "The Paper-hanger's Bride" in the *Century*, or "The Dish-washer's Farewell" in the *Ladies' Home Journal*, than she has for the reporter who, by sheer force of humor, pathos, and imagination, has raised some trivial city happening to the dignity of a column "story" which becomes a three days' talk along Park Row.

That there are women who habitually judge literary matter strictly on its merits, and without regard to the quality of the paper on which it is printed, I will not deny—I am even willing to admit that there are women who will lead trumps at whist—but I most solemnly affirm that the average well-educated, clever reading woman of to-day believes in her secret heart that a magazine story possesses a higher degree of merit than a newspaper sketch *because* it appears in a magazine,

and that the "literary man" who has succeeded in selling enough short stories to the monthlies to enable him to republish them in book form has won for himself a more imposing niche in the temple of fame than should be accorded to the late Mr. J. A. MacGahan, who was nothing but a newspaper reporter to the time of his death.

A few cases of Swelled Head resulting from the flattery of women may be mentioned here for the benefit of my imaginary young friend from Park Row, to whom they should serve as so many awful examples of what may happen to one who deserts the narrow and rugged path of honest literary endeavor for the easy-going drawing-rooms in which "faking" and even literary and artistic theft are looked upon with complacency and tolerance.

About fifteen years ago sundry poems, essays, and short stories, bearing a signature which is almost forgotten now, began

to attract the attention of the critical, and before long their author came to be looked upon as one of the most promising and talented young writers in the city. Unfortunately for himself, however, his very cleverness and its remarkable precocity proved his ultimate ruin. He was a very young man when he emerged from his native commonplace obscurity and crept, almost unaided, to the very edge of the great white fierce light in whose rays the most ordinary of folks become famous.

And, having reached the outer edge of this brilliant disk of light, he leisurely sate himself down to rest, firmly believing that he was in the very center of it, and that the silly flattery of underbred and half-educated women, and some ridiculous puffery at the hands of time-serving reviewers and paragraphers, were the greenest bays of Parnassus. He became thoroughly satisfied with himself and with his work; and the Swelled Head assumes no more

virulent or insidious form than that. He did not become an unpleasant, egotistical nuisance, as many people similarly afflicted do. I cannot remember that he talked very much about himself or his work; he simply agreed with himself that he was the greatest writer of the age, and that he had already achieved fame and glory of the highest sort.

That was not more than a dozen years ago, and at that time his name was on everybody's lips as the "coming man" of the period. Ah me! how many of these "coming" men and women have come and gone along the outer edge of the great white light within my short memory!

In the past six years I have not seen anything from his pen nor heard him spoken of a dozen times. I saw him the other night on Third Avenue, and if the light from a huge sibilant electric lamp had not shone upon him much more vividly than the great white light of fame

ever did, I would never have known him. Seedy, abject, repulsive, he seemed fitted for no rôle in life other than that of an "awful example" to accompany one whose profession it is to go about delivering lectures on the evil results of indulgence in Swelled Head.

In another case of Swelled Head which has come under my observation, the victim is a woman — rather an unusual thing, for a woman's vanity is not, as a rule, as deep-seated as a man's. This woman, whom I will call Margaret Mealy, and whose real name is well known to thousands of magazine readers, dwells in a pleasant inland town and has for a neighbor an old-time friend and fellow-writer named Henry Kornkrop. Both are graduates of the old *Ledger* school — many a Friday morning have they sat side by side on the poets' bench in the outer office, watching the awful shadow of Robert Bonner moving to and fro behind the

glass partition—and both have been successful, though in widely different ways.

Mrs. Mealy has made the tastes of mediocre people her life-study, and, as she has never for a single moment lost sight of the great literary principles which she acquired during the period of her apprenticeship, she has continued to keep herself in touch with editorial likes and dislikes, with the result that she is now a regular contributor to the leading magazines, and the author of various short stories and serials of such incredible stupidity that I often wonder what hypnotic or persuasive powers made it possible for her to dispose of them.

Her neighbor, Henry Kornkrop, is a literary worker of another stamp. He goes to work every morning at nine o'clock, and from that hour until noon the click of his type-writer does not cease for a single instant. Two hours more in the afternoon complete his day's stint; and

as his contract with his publishers calls for neither punctuation, paragraphs, nor capitals, he is able to turn out a stupendous quantity of fiction from one Christmas day to another. He writes over the name of "Lady Gwendoline Dunrivers," and deals exclusively with aristocratic life and character. Many a young shop-girl going down-town in an early elevated train with the latest "Lady Gwendoline" in her hand has been carried past Grand Street and awakened with a start from her dream of Lord Cecil, with his tawny mustache and clear-blue eyes, to find herself at the Battery terminus of the road. There is strong meat in Henry Kornkrop's work, and his publishers gladly buy every ream that he turns out. In one sense he leads an ideal literary life, with no editors to refuse his work or alter it to suit the tastes of their readers, no vulgar publicity, no adverse criticisms to wound his feelings, and, best of all, no pecuniary care; for the "Lady

Gwendoline" romances bring him in not less than $10,000 a year, which is probably twice as much as Mrs. Mealy makes.

Of course neither of these writers turns out any decent work the year through, if we are to judge them by a respectable literary standard; but it is not easy to determine which of the two is the more culpable — Margaret Mealy, who puts gas-fitters to sleep, or Henry Kornkrop, who keeps dish-washers awake. I fancy, however, that there are few of my readers who will disagree with me in my opinion that, of the two, honest Henry Kornkrop is by far the more successful and prosperous. And yet Mrs. Mealy made up her mind a few years ago that she really could not afford to be on such familiar terms with the Kornkrops — not that Mrs. K. was not the very best of women, and Henry the most industrious of men — but simply because her position before the world as a literary woman made it necessary for

her to be a little particular about her associates.

In other words, the silly flattery of young women in search of autographs, and of mendacious reviewers who have manuscript to dispose of, has been sufficient to upset the mental equilibrium of this most excellent woman and leave her a victim of the Swelled Head, pitied by all who know her, and by none more than by her old associate of the poets' bench, Henry Kornkrop, the modest and gifted author of the "Lady Gwendoline" romances.

One more instance of Swelled Head and I am done. The case to which I refer is that of Mr. E. F. Benson, the author of *Dodo*, who has, I am credibly informed, been so overwhelmed with attentions from women of rank and fashion that his evenings are now fully occupied with social functions and he is unable to attend night-school. This is to be regretted, for Mr.

Benson is by no means devoid of cleverness, and I am sure that in an institution of learning of the kind that I have named he would soon master such mysteries of syntax as the subjunctive mood, and at the same time vastly improve his style by constant study of such masterpieces of simple, direct English as, "Ho! the ox does go," and "Lo! I do go up."

CHAPTER VIII.

LITERATURE—PAWED AND UNPAWED; AND THE CROWN-PRINCE THEREOF.

"SEE here!" cried a friend of mine the other day, "you're always crying down the magazines, but I'll bet you couldn't write a magazine story to save your neck!"

My dear boy, I never said I could write one—in fact, I am very sure I couldn't; it's all I can do to read them after the other people have written them. That is an infirmity which has, I am sure, interfered seriously with my labors as a critic—this inability to wade through everything that the magazine editors are kind enough to set before us. But I contrive

to keep in touch with contemporary fiction by frequenting the Mercantile Library, where I can not only read and write undisturbed, but also take note of what others are reading and writing. And toward the close of each month I make it a point to arrive very early of a morning and take a superficial glance at the pages of the different periodicals, in order to gain an idea of the relative popularity of each one, and of the stories which they contain. When I find a story that is smeared with the grime of innumerable hands, or a magazine that has been torn almost to shreds by scores of eager readers, I retire to a corner and try to find out the cause of all the trouble.

But this labor-saving system, excellent as it is in many ways, has its defects; and so it happened that I came very near missing one of the most charming stories that I have ever found in the pages of a magazine.

One bleak autumnal morning not many years ago I paid one of my periodical early visits to the library, and had just finished my examination of the literary market when my eye happened to fall on the name of François Coppée printed in about the last place in the world that one would be apt to look for it—namely, in the table of contents of *Harper's Magazine*. It was signed to a story called "The Rivals," and although the pages of that story were neither torn by nervous feminine claws nor blackened by grimy hands I began to read it, and as I read New York slipped away from me, the wheezing of the asthmatic patrons of the library became inaudible to me, for I was in Paris with the young poet and his two loves. When I had finished the book I looked up and saw that I was still in the library, for there were the shelves full of what are termed the "leading periodicals of the day," and two elderly ladies were racing

across the room for the new number of *Life*.

And then in the fullness of my heart I gave thanks to the great firm of publishers that had dared to violate all the sacred traditions that have been handed down from the Bonnerian to the Johnsonian age of letters and print a story that could make me forget for half an hour that I had a thousand words of "humorous matter" to write before twelve o'clock.

It was sad to come back from the *coulisses* of the Vaudeville and find myself directly opposite the shelf containing the *Chautauquan Magazine* and within earshot of the rustling of *Harper's Bazar;* but I turned to my work in a better spirit because of M. Coppée and the Harpers, and I have reason to believe that the quality of the "humorous matter" which I constructed that afternoon was superior in fibre and durability to the ordinary products of my hands. I know that a

dealer to whom I occasionally brought a basketful of my wares gave me an order the very next day to serve him once a week regularly thereafter, and as he has been a steady and prompt-paying customer ever since I have special cause to feel grateful to the famous house of Harper for the literary stimulus which the story gave me.

I have already alluded to the fact that the pages on which "The Rivals" was printed were not torn and discolored like those containing other much-read and widely discussed romances. It was this circumstance which led me to reflect on the difficulties and discouragement which confront the editor whose ambition it is to give his subscribers fiction of the very best literary quality. In this instance the experiment had been fairly tried and yet at the end of the month the virgin purity of these pages was, to me at least, sadly significant of the fact that Coppée's de-

lightful work had not met with the appreciation which it deserved.

I did not, of course, lose sight of the fact that the story appealed almost exclusively to a class of people who keep their fingers clean (and have cleanly minds also), and that it was, therefore, not improbable that it had found more readers than the condition of its pages would indicate; but nevertheless I was forced to the reluctant admission that from a commercial point of view the publication of "The Rivals" had proved a failure; nor has the opinion which I formed then been upset by later observation and knowledge. All of which served to heighten my admiration for the enlightened policy which gave this unusual bit of fiction to the American public.

I said something of this sort to a friend of mine, who, although rather given to fault-finding, had to admit that the Harpers had done a praiseworthy and coura-

geous thing in printing M. Coppée's story. "Yes," said my friend, rather grudgingly, "it was a big thing of Alden to buy that story; but if that story had been offered to them by an American they wouldn't have touched it with a forty-foot pole."

My friend was quite right, for if that story, or one like it, were offered in the literary market by an American writer, the editor to whom it was offered would know at once that it had been stolen, and would be perfectly justified in locking his office door and calling for the police. Coppée has simply told the story of a young poet beloved of two women, a shop-girl and an actress; and he has told it truthfully as well as artistically — so truthfully, in fact, that I shudder when I think of the number of people of the "Christian Endeavor" type who must have withdrawn their names from the *Monthly's* subscription-list because of it. If I could be assured that the number of these

wretched Philistines were far exceeded by that of the intelligent men and women who added their names because of this important step in the direction of true art, I would feel far more confident than I do now of a bright near future for American letters.

The very next day after that on which I read "The Rivals" I was aroused by a sudden agitation which spread through the reading-room of the quiet library in which I was at work. The table on which my books and papers were spread shook so that the thought of a possible earthquake flashed across my startled mind, and I looked up in time to see the young woman opposite to me drop the tattered remnants of *Harper's Bazar*, from which she had just deciphered an intricate pattern, rush across the room, and pounce upon a periodical which had just been placed on its shelf by the librarian. If she had been a second later the three other

women who approached at the same moment from three different parts of the room would have fought for this paper like ravening wolves.

The Christmas number of the *Ladies' Home Journal* had arrived.

I do not know of any magazine which so truthfully reflects the literary tendency of the age as this extraordinary Philadelphia publication, and I am not surprised to learn, as I have on undisputed authority, that it has a larger circulation than any other journal of its class in this country. It is conducted by that gifted literary exploiter and brilliant romancer, Mr. E. W. Bok, the legitimate successor to Mr. Johnson, and the present crown-prince of American letters.

I took the trouble to examine the number which the librarian had removed, and found that it had been pawed perfectly black, while many of its pages were torn and frayed in a way that indicated that

they had found a host of eager readers. Here was pawed literature with a vengeance, and so, after leaving the library that afternoon, I purchased a copy of the Christmas number, thrust it under my coat, and skulked home.

All that evening until well into the early hours of the new day, I sat with that marvelous literary production before me, eagerly devouring every line of its contents, and honestly admiring the number of high-priced advertisements which met my eye, and the high literary quality of many of them. When I finally pushed the Christmas number away and rose from my table it was with a feeling of enthusiasm tempered with awe for the many-sided genius that controlled and had devised this widely circulated and incomparable journal. I must confess, also, to a feeling of admiration tinged with envy that took possession of my soul as I read the serials to which were affixed the names

of some of the most distinguished writers in America. I have spoken in an earlier chapter of the "good bad stuff" produced by my friend the poet, and in which he took such honest pride; and I would like nothing better than to ask him his opinion of the "bad bad stuff" which the acknowledged leaders of our national school of letters had unblushingly contributed, and for which, as I have since learned, they were paid wages that were commensurate with their shame. Now the author who writes a good story is entitled to his just mead of praise, but what shall we say of the author who succeeds in selling for a large sum the serial that he wrote during his sophomore year in college? I say, and I am sure my friend the practical poet will agree with me, that he ought to be the president of an industrial life-insurance company.

As for the literary huckster who succeeds in distending the circulation of an

almost moribund weekly journal to unheard-of limits by the infusion of this and other equally bad bad stuff, I am at a loss for terms that will do fitting tribute to his ability, and must leave that duty for some more comprehensive reviewer of a future generation who will do full justice to the genius of our great contemporary in an exhaustive treatise on *English Literature from Chaucer to Bok.*

Although as yet only the heir apparent to the crown of letters, Mr. Bok has acquired an undeniable and far-reaching influence in the realm which he will one day be called upon to govern, and has strongly impressed his individuality on contemporaneous literature, in which respect his position is not unlike that of the Prince of Wales in England. Among the more noteworthy of the literary products which have added lustre to the period of his minority may be mentioned "Heart-to-Heart Talks about Pillow-shams"; "Why

My Father Loved Muffins," by Mamie Dickens; "Where the Tidies Blow"; "The Needs of a Canary," by the Rev. Elijah Gas; and "How I Blow My Nose," by the Countess of Aberdeen. Mr. Bok has also made a strong bid for the favor of the sex which is always gentle and fair by his vigorous championship of what is termed an "evening musicale," an abomination which still flourishes in spite of the persistent and systematic efforts of strong, brave men to suppress it. A timely Christmas article on the subject, published about a year ago, was found to be almost illegible before it had been on the Mercantile Library shelves a fortnight. This article is by the wife of an eminent specialist in nervous diseases—it may be that she has an eye on her husband's practice—and it contains elaborate instructions as to the best way of inflicting the evening musicale on peaceful communities. How to entrap the guests, what indigestibles to serve,

how to prevent the men from escaping when the bass viol begins its deadly work, and how to make them believe they have had a pleasant time, are among the minutiæ treated in this invaluable essay.

It is by sheer force of tireless industry and a complete mastery of every detail of his prodigious literary enterprise that Mr. Bok has placed himself in the proud position which he occupies to-day. He is the acknowledged authority on such subjects as the bringing up of young girls, the care of infants, the cleansing of flannel garments, and the crocheting of door-mats. In the gentle art of tatting he has no superior, and has long held the medal as the champion light-weight tatter of America. In his leisure moments he "chats with Mrs. Burnett," "spends evenings with Mark Twain," and interviews the clever progeny of distinguished men in the interest of his widely circulated monthly.

The homely qualities to which I have

alluded in the preceding paragraph have made Mr. Bok our crown-prince, but he will live in history as the discoverer of a new force in literary mechanics—a force which may, with justice, be compared to the sound-waves which have been the mainspring of Mr. Edison's inventions, and one which is destined to produce results so far-reaching and important that the most acute literary observer is utterly unable to make any estimate of them.

The use of the names of distinguished men and women to lend interest to worthless or uninteresting articles on topics of current interest dates back to the most remote period of the world's history, but it was Mr. Bok who discovered, during a temporary depression in the celebrity market, that a vast horde of their relations were available for literary purposes, and that there was not much greater "pull" in the name of a citizen who had won distinction in commerce, art, litera-

ture, in the pulpit or on the bench, than there was in those of his wife, his aunt, his sister, and his children even unto the third and fourth generation.

It was this discovery that led to the publication of the popular and apparently endless series of essays bearing such titles as "The Wives of Famous Pastors," "Bright Daughters of Well-known Men," "Proud Uncles of Promising Young Story-writers," and "Invalid Aunts of Daring Athletes." The masterpiece of these biographical batches was the one bearing the general head of "Faces We Seldom See," and it was this one which established beyond all question or doubt the permanent worth and importance of Mr. Bok's discovery. The faces of those whom we often see have been described in the public prints from time immemorial, but it was the editor of the *Ladies' Home Journal* who discovered the great commercial value that lurked in the faces of men and

women who were absolutely unknown outside their own limited circles of friends.

Then the relations of the celebrities became writers on their own account, and straightway the pages of Mr. Bok's invaluable magazine glistened with "How My Wife's Great-uncle Wrote 'Rip Van Winkle,'" by Peter Pointdexter; "My Childhood in the White House," by Ruth McKee; "How Much Money My Uncle is Worth," by Cornelius Waldorf Astorbilt; and "Recollections of R. B. Hayes," by his ox and his ass.

Even a well-trained mind becomes stunned and bewildered in an attempt to estimate the extent to which this newly discovered force can be carried. The imagination can no more grasp it than it can grasp the idea of either space or eternity, and it is my firm belief that under the impetus already acquired in the *Ladies' Home Journal* the hoofs of the relations of celeb-

rities will go clattering down through the literature of centuries as yet unborn.

In the mind of a celebrity the prospect is one calculated to rob the grave of half its repose; nevertheless it must be a comfort to pass away in the great white light of fame, cheered by the thought that the stricken wife, the orphaned children, and the consumptive aunt are left with a perpetual source of income at their fingers' ends.

A well-thumbed paragraph in a recent number of the *Journal* announces that Mr. Bok has trampled upon his diffident, sensitive nature to the extent of permitting "what he considers a very satisfactory portrait" of himself to be offered to his admirers at the low price of a quarter of a dollar apiece. This offer, which bears the significant heading "The Girl Who Loves Art," is made with the express stipulation that intending purchasers shall not deepen the blush on the gifted editor's

cheek by sending their orders direct to the *Home Journal* office, but shall address them direct to the photographer, Mr. C. M. Gilbert, of 926 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia.

I desire to add that I reprint this generous proposition of my own free will and without either solicitation on the part of Mr. Bok or hope of reward from the photographer whose precious privilege it has been to transmit to the cabinet-sized cardboard the likeness of America's crown-prince. I would not do this for Mr. Gilder, for Mr. Scribner, or for any of the Harpers. I would do it only for Mr. E. W. Bok.

CHAPTER IX.

CERTAIN THINGS WHICH A CONSCIENTIOUS LITERARY WORKER MAY FIND IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK.

LET us return to my imaginary young friend from Park Row, to whom I have referred in a previous chapter, and let us picture him at a small social gathering in the drawing-room of some clever and charming woman of fashion, of the kind that assiduously cultivate the society of men of art and letters because they like to hear the gossip of literature, the stage, and the studio "at first hand," if I may use the term.

Our young friend is modest and well-bred, and, moreover, carries with him a

certain breezy and intimate knowledge of the men and events of the day which fairly entitles him to a place of his own in what ought to be the most enjoyable of all circles of society. He is delighted with the young women whom he meets here in what his hostess fondly hopes will become a *salon*—how many New York women have had a similar ambition!—and yet he cannot understand why they pay so much attention to certain gentlemen who are present also, and whom he knows to be of very small account so far as the arts and letters are concerned.

Young Daubleigh is there, the centre of a breathless group, to whom he is bewailing the utter lack of all true art sense on the part of Americans, and the hideousness of New York, which, he declares, offers absolutely nothing to a true artist. Daubleigh never goes into society without a pocketful of art phrases, such as "*au premier coup*," "he has found his true

métier," "the divine art of Velasquez," and others of the same sort. Of course he is a great social favorite, and of course he has very high ideals of his art, and is apt to refer slightingly to artists who know how to draw as "mere illustrators"—a form of speech which does not somehow endear him to those who know that he ought to be at Cooper Union learning the rudiments of his calling.

Another guest, and a favorite one too, is the strangely gifted romancer who poses as a literary man because he has sold two sonnets and a short story to one of the magazines, and of whom it is related in an awestruck whisper that he once went through Mulberry Bend, disguised with green side-whiskers and under the protection of a Central Office detective—all this in search of what he calls "local color."

Our young friend from Park Row spent two hours in Mulberry Bend the night

before in search of a "story" for his paper, and has the hardihood to say so to the charming young girl beside him, adding that he felt as safe as if he had been at an organ recital. The next moment he realizes that he has made a mistake in trying to destroy any of the glamour that shines from the green whiskers and the detective. The conversation now turns upon the availability of New York as a field for the writer of fiction, and is ably sustained by a young gentleman who is known to be "literary," although no one can say definitely what he has written. However, he is literary enough to have a place in this *salon*, and to take a leading part in the discussions which go on there. He is very decided in his views regarding literature, as distinguished from what he calls "mere newspaper scribbling," and does not scruple to express his contempt for anything that is not printed either in a magazine or "between covers," as he

puts it in his careless, professional fashion. Like many a one of the gentler sex, he has been dazzled in early life by the glare from the supercalendered paper. It is now nearly two years since he first began to be a literary man, and he regards the progress that he has made during that period as extremely gratifying, for he has put himself on an excellent footing in three or four of the most delightful literary and artistic *salons* in the city, and confidently expects to have a story published in one of the leading monthlies by midsummer. And that story will be published, as I happen to know, as soon as he has made certain alterations suggested by the editor — taken out the strong scene between the banker's daughter and the poor but impulsive suitor, and modified various sentences which in their present form might wound the susceptibilities of a large contingent of subscribers.

This promising young writer has been

such a constant visitor to magazine offices since he first embarked on a literary career, and has associated so much with the junior members of the editorial staffs (or staves?), that his opinions are a reflex of theirs, and he is now thoroughly in accord with those with whom he is anxious to do business.

Therefore when he remarks, in that superior manner which insures for him the instant credulity of the women in the company, that it is not worth an author's while to study the social structure of New York, he is right from his own point of view, and it ill becomes our young friend from Park Row to despise him for it. And when he goes on to say that our beloved city has no individuality of its own, and is permeated through and through with the awful flavor of commerce, while its society is nothing but a plutocracy, I would advise my young friend of the city department to draw him out and make

careful notes of what he says about life and literature.

This young man of letters is merely echoing the opinions of those at whose feet he has sat, humbly and reverently acknowledging their literary supremacy, and fondly hoping that they will purchase his manuscript. He knows that Johnson does not like low life, just as Jack Moran knew that Bonner would not tolerate second marriages or fast horses; and so far as his own literary ambitions are concerned, a thorough knowledge of New York would prove about as useful to him as a familiarity with the customs and beliefs of the Mormons or the names of the Derby winners would have been to the old-time *Ledger* poets.

But the young reporter, who hears him with feelings of either amusement or contempt or indignation, as the case may be, has already seen enough of New York—it may be that he is able to compare it

with foreign capitals—to know that there is an abundance of material within its limits which native writers of fiction have not only left untouched, but of whose very existence most of them are absolutely unaware. But it would be useless for him to say so in this company, for he who has just spoken so decisively is a "literary man," whose work will one day be printed on the finest quality of paper and perhaps adorned with beautiful pictures. And besides, do not all the nice people live north of Washington Square?

Ah! those nice people and that supercalendered paper—what an influence they exert in our literary Vanity Fair!

Perhaps one of the young literary men will go on to say, in proof of his theory about the literary poverty of New York, that the magazines have already published a great many articles and stories about the Bowery and the east side, and have in fact quite covered the field without

enriching the literature of the day to any very noticeable degree. All of which is perfectly true, but the results might have been different had the work been intrusted in each case to a writer who was familiar with the subject instead of to one whose only qualification was that he had mastered the art of writing matter suitable for magazines—or, in other words, "literature." An exception to this rule, and a notable one too, was made in the case of Jacob A. Riis, who wrote some articles for *Scribner's Magazine* a few years ago on the poor of New York, and who is known as the author of *How the Other Half Lives* and *The Children of the Poor*. Mr. Riis knows his subject thoroughly—he has been a police reporter for years—and his contributions are valuable because of the accuracy of the information which they contain, which is more than can be said of the work of some of the wiseacres and gifted story-writers who

seem to stand so well in the estimation of the magazine managers.

But, fortunately enough, the truth is mighty, and must, in the long run, prevail, in literature as in other forms of art; and the enduring novel of New York will be written, not by the man who, knowing his audience of editors rather than his subject, is content with a thin coating of that literary varnish known as "local color," but by this very young man from Park Row or Herald Square, to whom I take the liberty of addressing a few words of encouragement and advice. When this young man sits down to write that novel, it will be because he is so full of his subject, so thoroughly in sympathy with his characters—no matter whether he takes them from an opium-joint in Mott Street or a ball at Delmonico's—and so familiar with the various influences which have shaped their destinies, that he will set about his task with the firm con-

viction that he has a story to tell to the world.

In that novel the "local color" will be found in the blood and bones: it will not be smeared over the outside surface with a flannel rag. And men and women will read the story and talk about it and think about it, just as they are reading and talking and thinking about "Trilby" now.

Did you ever hear any one talk about Mr. Du Maurier's "local color"? I never did.

But it was for the best of reasons that the barbed-wire fence was stretched across the city just below Cooper Union, although it shut out from view a quarter of the town in which may be found a greater and more interesting variety of human life and customs than in any other region that I know of. Of course this literary quarantine was not effected for the benefit of men and women of clean, intelli-

gent, cultivated minds, but to avoid giving offense to the half-educated and quarter-bred folks whose dislike for what they consider "low" and "vulgar" is only equaled by their admiration of all that is "genteel" and their impassioned interest in the doings of "carriage company."

I have sometimes accompanied parties of sight-seers through what was to them an entirely unknown territory, south of the barbed-wire fence, and I have noticed in almost every instance that it was only the men and women of a high social and intellectual grade who showed any true interest in, or appreciation of, what they saw there. There have been others in these little expeditions who looked to me as if they stood in perpetual fear of running across some of their own relations, and one of these once gravely assured me that Hester Street was not at all "nice."

Chinatown is to me a singularly attractive spot, because of its vivid colors,

its theatre, joss-house, restaurants, and opium-joints—those mysterious dens in which the Occident and Orient are brought into the closest companionship, while the fumes of the burning "dope" cloy the senses, and outcasts from every clime—the Chinese highbinder jostling against the Broadway confidence man—smoke and drink side by side, talking the while with a looseness of tongue that would be impossible under any influence other than that of opium. Mr. William Norr, a New York reporter, has told us a great many interesting and curious things about the human types—Caucasian as well as Mongolian—to be found in this quarter, and his book, *Stories from Chinatown*, possesses the rare merit of being absolutely true in color, fact, and detail.

But there is something in this alien settlement that seems to me to possess a greater interest, a deeper significance, than the garish lights of the colored lanterns

or the pungent smoke of the poppy-seed, and that is the new hybrid race that is growing to maturity in its streets and tenements. There are scores of these little half-breeds to be seen there, and one of them has just come prominently before the American public in the person of Mr. George Appo, the son of a Chinese murderer and an Irishwoman, and himself a pickpocket, green-goods operator, as well as one of the most entertaining and instructive of all the witnesses examined before the Lexow Committee.

The Chinese and Italians rub elbows in this corner of the town, and a single step will bring us into Mulberry Bend, bright with red handkerchiefs and teeming with the olive-skinned children of Italy. Nowhere in the whole city is there a stronger clan feeling than here—a feeling that manifests itself not only in the craft and ferocity of the vendetta, but also in a spirit which impels these poverty-stricken

exiles to stand by one another in the hour of trouble. There is no better-paying property to be had than one of these Mulberry Street tenements, for it is seldom, indeed, that the Italian poor will permit one of their number to be turned into the street for want of a month's rent.

The Jewish old-clothing quarter that lies close to the Five Points is near by. The "pullers-in," as the sidewalk salesmen are termed in the vernacular of the trade, transact business with a ferocity that can be best likened to that of Siberian wolves; but over beyond Chatham Square lies the Hebrew burying-ground, an ancient patch of sacred soil which all the money in New York could not buy from the descendants of those whose ashes repose there.

A few short blocks north of this old landmark lies one of the most famous political districts in the town, one which is liable to become the pivotal point in an

exciting and closely contested election. There is a saloon here on one of the side-streets which it may be worth your while to visit. It is a dark, uninviting place, and its interior, with its rows of liquor barrels and boxes and its throng of blear-eyed, tough-looking customers, suggests anything but wealth and power. Nevertheless the taciturn little Irishman whose name is over the door has grown rich here and is the Warwick of the district so far as the minor city offices are concerned. And it was to this rumshop, as the whole ward knows, that a President of the United States came in his carriage one Sunday morning not many years ago, to make sure of the fealty of its proprietor and pour the oil of patronage on the troubled political waters.

And furthermore it is related of this district boss — who stands in the same relation to his constituents that the Roman senator of old did to his clients — that

once at the close of an election day of more than ordinary importance one of his lieutenants burst in upon him, as he sat with a few faithful henchmen in the back room of his saloon, and announced triumphantly that his candidate had carried a certain election district by a vote of one hundred and fifty-five to one. And at this intelligence the east-side Warwick swore a mighty oath, and, striking his clenched fist fiercely on the table before him, exclaimed: "What I want to know is the name of the wan sucker that voted agin us!"

And while you are strolling along the Bowery you may come across an oldish-looking man with a dyed or gray mustache and a suggestion of former rakishness in his seedy clothes and well-preserved silk hat—a man who seems to have outlived his calling, whatever it may have been, and to have been left high and dry with no intimate companionship save that of

his own thoughts. It will pay you to get acquainted with this old man, for he belongs to a race which is fast disappearing, the race of old-time American gamblers, of which Bret Harte's John Oakhurst is the best type to be found in our national fiction. He still survives in the West and South, but here in New York his place has been taken by the new brood of race-track plungers and Hebrew bookmakers; and the faro-box from which he used to deal with deft fingers, and the lookout chair from which he was wont in the olden times to watch the progress of the game with quick, searching eyes and impassive face, know him no more.

If you are studying the different dialects of the town, you should make careful notes of this old man's speech and of the peculiar way in which he uses the present tense in describing bygone happenings. Mr. H. L. Wilson has given us, in his excellent book of stories called *Zig-*

zag Tales, the following delicious bit of dialect, which I quote because it well illustrates what I have said. The words are taken from the lips of the "lookout," and are addressed in a cautious undertone to the faro-dealer:

"See his nobs there with the moniment of azures? I'm bettin' chips to coppers that's Short-card Pete. He's had his mustache cut off, 'n' he's heavier 'n he was ten years ago. He tends bar in Noorleans, in '68, fer Doc Nagle—ole Doc, you rec'lect—'n' he works the boats a spell after that. See 'im one night play'n' bank at Alf Hennesey's, an' he pulls out thirty-two solid thousan'; Slab McGarr was dealin', 'nis duck here makes him turn over the box. See 'im 'nother time at San'tone, 'na little geeser works a sleeve holdout on 'im—one a these here ole-time tin businesses; you never see a purtier gun play 'n he makes—it goes, too; mebbe it was n'swif'! He's a-pullin'

on that gang; get onto that chump shuffle, will you? Ain't that a play fer yer life? He ain't overlookin' any bets."

"What are you giving us?" is the contemptuous cry of my young friend from Park Row who has done me the honor to read what I have written. "I know all that about Chinatown and the politicians as well as you do."

So you do, my young friend, and I have no doubt you know it a great deal better than I do; but I had a double motive in offering you the words of suggestion which you have taken the trouble to follow. In the first place, when the young literary man of limited achievement, referred to in an earlier part of this chapter, obtains an order for an article on "The Coast of Chatham Square," he will probably come to you to find out where Chatham Square is and at what time they light the gas there; and I am sure you will be glad to help him to the full extent

of your knowledge, although you may wonder why the order was given to him instead of to you. In the second place, although the whole of the east side is familiar ground to you, there are plenty of intelligent, well-informed men and women who know very little about what this city contains, and if you will read my next chapter you will learn of the impression which the tenement-house district made upon a certain distinguished gentleman who saw it recently for the first time.

CHAPTER X.

"HE TRUN UP BOTE HANDS!"

ONE summer evening not very long ago, I saw, to my intense surprise, Mr. Richard Watson Gilder crawl cautiously through the barbed-wire fence which was long ago stretched, with his sanction, across the city at Cooper Union. Once within the tabooed district, the distinguished poet and *Century* editor cast an apprehensive glance about him and then marched swiftly and resolutely down the Bowery. Late that night I caught another glimpse of him standing in the middle of one of the side-streets that lead to the East River, and gazing thoughtfully at the tops of the tall tenement-houses on either side of him.

I could not help wondering what strange errand had brought him to that crowded quarter of the town, for not many months before one of his own trusted subordinates had blandly informed me that there was nothing in New York to write about, excepting, of course, such phases of its social life as had been portrayed, more or less truthfully and vividly, in the pages of Mr. Gilder's own magazine.

I was still marveling at the spectacle of the poet in search of facts when I came across one of my east-side acquaintances, who had seen and recognized the *Century* editor, and from him I learned that he was pursuing his studies of what is known in the magazine offices as "low life," not that he might write about it or be capable of judging the manuscript of those who did write about it, but by virtue of his office on the Tenement-house Commission.

"He's just been down Ludlow Street, an' troo one o' dem houses where de Jew sweaters is," added my friend.

"And what did he say to it all?" I inquired.

"He trun up bote hands!" said the east-sider, earnestly.

I walked home that night weighed down with the import of what I had learned, and filled with solemn speculations regarding the effect which Mr. Gilder's visit would have on American letters. I could picture to myself the hands that would be "trun up" in the *Century* office when the accomplished members of the editorial corps learned that their revered chief had actually ventured into the heart of a district which teems with an infinite variety of human life and lies but a scant mile to the south of the desk from which Mr. Johnson rules the literary world of this continent.

And I thought, also, of the excitement

that would run through the ranks of the writers should Mr. Johnson, of course after solemn and secret communion with Mr. Gilder, announce officially that at twelve o'clock, noon, on the first day of the month, the firing of a gun, followed by the destruction of the barbed-wire fence, would throw open the long-forbidden low-life territory to poets, romancers, and dialectists of every degree. What a rush of literary boomers there would be to this new Oklahoma should this old barrier be torn down! I could not help smiling as I pictured to myself the strangely gifted American story-writers groping their way through picturesque and unfamiliar scenes, and listening in vain for the good old "bad man's" dialect that has done duty in fiction ever since Thackeray visited this country, but which was swept away long since by the great flood-tide of German and Jewish immigration which has wrought so many

changes in the life of the town. How many ink-stained hands would be "trun up" before the first day of exploration was done! How many celebrated delineators of New York life and character would lose themselves in their search, after dark, for "local color," and be gathered in like lost children to be cared for by Matron Webb until rescued by their friends the next morning!

Still brooding over the enormous possibilities of the future, I stopped to rest and refresh myself in a modest and respectable little German beer-saloon, situated on the tabooed side of the barbed-wire fence—on the very border-land between low life and legitimate literary territory. It is an ordinary enough little place, with a bar and tables in front, and, in a space curtained off at the rear, a good-sized room often used for meetings and various forms of merry-making. I never drop in for a glass of

beer without thinking of a supper given in that back room a few years ago at which I was a guest; and on this particular night remembrance of that feast had a new significance, for it was blended with thoughts of Mr. Gilder's journeyings. It was an actor who gave the supper—one of the most brilliant and talented of the many foreign entertainers who have visited our shores—and nearly every one of his guests had won some sort of artistic distinction. It is not the sort of a place that suggests luxurious feasting, but the supper which the worthy German and his wife set before us was, to me, a revelation of the resources of their national cookery. The occasion lingers in my memory, however, chiefly by reason of the charm and tact and brilliancy of the woman who sat in the place of honor—a woman whose name rang through Europe more than a quarter of a century ago as that of the

heroine of one of the most sensational duels of modern times. Mr. Gilder has probably read about her in *The Tragic Comedians*, in which George Meredith has made her the principal character, and I am sure that if he—the *Century* editor, not Mr. Meredith—had looked in upon our little supper party that night, he would have "trun up bote hands," in the full sense of that unique and expressive term.

Recollections of this feast brought to mind another which was given about two years ago fully half a mile to the south of the barbed-wire fence, and which is worthy of mention here because it taught me that some of the people bred in that region are vaguely conscious of a just claim that they have on the attention of story-writers and rather resent the fact that a place in our national literature has been denied them.

The feast to which I allude was given

on the occasion of a great wedding in a quarter of the town which plays an important part in civic and national affairs on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November—one in which the trade of politics ranks as one of the learned professions—a quarter where events date from the reigns of the different police captains.

The bride was the daughter of a famous politician, and I am sure that in point of beauty and tasteful dress she might have passed muster at Tuxedo. She was tall, graceful, and very young—not more than seventeen. One could see traces of her Hebrew lineage in her exquisitely lovely face, and I am sure she was well dressed, because she wore nothing that in any way detracted from her rare beauty or was offensive to the eye.

She had been brought up near the corner of the Bowery and Hester Street, in the very centre of one of the most vi-

cious and depraved quarters of the town; and as I talked with her that night she told me how most of her childhood had been spent playing with her little brothers and sisters in the garden which her father had built for them on the roof of the house in which they lived, and on the ground floor of which he kept the saloon which laid the foundations of his present political influence. She spoke simply and in good English, and one could easily see how carefully she had been shielded from all knowledge even of that which went on around her.

An extraordinary company had assembled to witness the ceremony and take part in the festivities which followed, and as I sat beside two brilliant, shrewd, worldly-wise Hebrews of my acquaintance we remarked that it would be a long while before we could expect to see another such gathering. The most important of the guests were those high

in political authority or in the police department, men whose election districts are the modern prototype of the English "pocket boroughs" of the last century; while the humblest of them all, and the merriest as well, was the deaf-and-dumb boot-black of a down-town police court, who appeared in the unwonted splendor of a suit which he had hired especially for the occasion, and to which was attached a gorgeous plated watch-chain. "Dummy" had never been to dancing-school, but he was an adept in the art of sliding across the floor, and he showed his skill between the different sets, uttering unintelligible cries of delight and smiling blandly upon his acquaintances as he glided swiftly by them.

Several of the gentlemen present had "done time" in previous years, and others—John Y. McKane for example—have since then been "sent away." I saw one guest wink pleasantly at a police

captain who was standing near him and then slyly "lift" the watch from a friend's pocket, merely to show that he had not lost his skill. A moment later he awakened a little innocent mirth by asking his unsuspecting friend what time it was.

I dare say that a great many of my readers imagine that at a festivity of this description "down on the east side" the men appear for the most part clad in the red shirts which were in vogue at the time of Thackeray's visit to America, and which now exist only in the minds of those writers who are famous for the accuracy of their local color. As for the women, I have no doubt these same readers picture them in garments similar to those worn by the "tough girl" in Mr. Harrigan's drama, nor would they be surprised to learn that there was a fight every twenty minutes.

For their special benefit I will explain

that nearly every one of the men wore evening dress of the conventional pattern, and that the display of diamonds and costly gowns—many of which were tasteful as well—was a noteworthy one. There was an abundance of wine and strong drink for everybody, and a very thirsty company it was, too, but not a sign of trouble did I see the whole evening through. The truth of the matter is that to the majority of the men and women present a fight was a serious affair, and one not to be entered into lightly and unadvisedly.

For three hours I sat with my two Israelitish friends—a pool-room keeper and a dime-museum manager respectively—and talked about the people who passed and repassed before us, and I am bound to say that the conversation of a clever New York Jew of their type is almost always edifying and amusing.

"It's a curious thing," said one of my

companions at last, "but I really believe that we three men at this table are the only ones in the whole room who have any sort of sense of the picturesqueness of this thing, or are onto the gang of people gathered together here. There's probably not a soul in the room outside of ourselves but what imagines that this is just a plain, every-day sort of crowd and not one of the most extraordinary collections of human beings I've ever seen in my life, and I've been knocking round New York ever since I was knee-high. There are thousands of people giving up their good dust every week to go in and look at the freaks in my museum, and there's not one of them that's as interesting as dozens that we can see here to-night for nothing. Just look at that woman over there that all the politicians are bowing down to; and they've got a right to, too, for she's a big power in the district and knows

more about politics than Barney Rourke. They never dared pull *her* place when the police were making all those raids last month. Those diamonds she wears are worth ten thousand if they're worth a cent. There's a man who wouldn't be here to-night if it wasn't for the time they allow on a sentence for good behavior, and that fellow next him keeps a fence down in Elizabeth Street. There's pretty near every class of New Yorkers represented here to-night except the fellows that write the stories in the magazines. Where's Howells? I don't see him anywhere around," he exclaimed, ironically, rising from his chair as he spoke and peering curiously about. "Look under the table and see if he's there taking notes. Oh yes, I read the magazines very often when I have time, and some of the things I find in them are mighty good; but when those literary ducks start in to describe New York,

or at least this part of it—well, excuse *me*, I don't want any of it. This would be a great place, though, for a story-writer to come to if he really wanted to learn anything about the town."

I am perfectly sure that if Mr. Gilder had turned up at that wedding his hands would not have been the only ones "trun up" in honor of the visit. And I firmly believe that the visit of the *Century* editor to what is said to be the most densely populated square mile in the world will prove pregnant of great results, and may perhaps mark a distinct epoch in the history of letters.

On looking back over what I have written, it seems to me that I have devoted too much of my space to that portion of the city which lies below the barbed-wire fence; but I hope my transgression will be pardoned in view of the great significance of Mr. Gilder's recent explorations and also of the fact that the

region itself is so rich in literary material of the sort that a Victor Hugo or a Dickens would have seized upon with avidity. There are young men working in newspaper offices now who will one of these days draw true and vivid pictures of modern New York as it appears in the eyes and the brains of those who know it thoroughly, and very interesting fiction it will be, too. The late Mr. Mines (Felix Oldboy) and Mr. Thomas A. Janvier have written successfully and entertainingly of the town that our fathers and grandparents knew, but the book on New York of to-day has yet to be written, and I know of no one better qualified for the task than my young friend the reporter, whom I have personally addressed in preceding chapters.

It seems to me something like high treason to even hint of the possibility of a break in the present literary dynasty—an event which would be deplored by

none more bitterly than by my loyal self. Mr. Johnson's powers are still unimpaired, and his grasp on his pruning-hook is as firm as it was on the day that he suggested the reduction of the twelve flasks to two or three. I desire nothing more than that in history's page my name shall brightly glow beside his as his Boswell. Mr. Bok has already shown such remarkable capacity for benign and progressive rule that we may look forward with a reasonable degree of confidence to his peaceful and undisputed accession to the throne, and a new impetus to the sale of his photographs, which are dirt-cheap at a quarter of a dollar.

And yet let us not forget that France was not always a republic nor Germany a united empire; nor has there always been a Guelph on the throne of Edward the Confessor. During the past year a new literary power has arisen among us in the shape of the cheap magazines—

McClure's, the *Cosmopolitan*, and *Munsey's* —a power which is making itself felt more strongly every day, and may in the near future prove a serious menace to the established order of things. The rapidity with which these cheap monthlies have established themselves in the popular esteem is due primarily to the low price at which they are offered, and also, in a measure, to the fact that their conductors have not grown up in the *Ledger* or Johnson school, and therefore are not accomplished in the sort of editing which has reached its highest development in the offices of the leading monthlies. But it happens that each one of these cheap periodicals is controlled by a man of restless, energetic temperament—what is known in common parlance as a "hustler"—and if I am not much mistaken each one of these hustlers is firmly imbued with the American fancy for exploring new and untried

fields. Several of the stories published in these cheap magazines are of a sort forbidden in their more venerable contemporaries; and while I am not prepared to say that these stories are equal in point of merit to the ones which have been subjected to the Johnsonian process of selection and elimination, they have attracted attention because people found them different from those to which they had been accustomed.

Personally I have a profound faith in American hustlers. To me the term hustling is synonymous with those which describe cable-laying, bridge-building, and material progress of every kind, and when hustlers go into the business of publishing magazines it is time to be on the lookout for change of some sort. That the conductors of their older contemporaries appreciate this fact and are getting ready to trim sail if necessary is made evident to me by the Harpers' pub-

lication of "Trilby," and Mr. Gilder's journey to the populous kraals of the east side.

I will say no more regarding the cheap monthlies and their possible importance in the near future, because I do not wish to run the risk of being put on trial for high treason; and so I will bring my chapter to a close with a few words on a subject which I am sure lies close to the heart of every true woman in the land—the unexampled philanthropy shown by Mr. Bok in placing his photographs within reach of the humblest and poorest of his admirers. The editor's philanthropy is exceeded only by the diffidence betrayed in his announcement of the address of the photographer and the low price charged for the portraits.

The code of etiquette which governs the conduct of the dime-museum lecturer ordains that no brutally frank or emphatic allusions shall be made to the

pictures of the different human "freaks" which are offered for sale. "I believe," says the lecturer, in a tone of complete indifference, as he brings his glowing eulogy of the "Tattooed Queen" to a fitting close, "that the lady has a few of her photographs which she wishes to dispose of." And as the lady has eight of them in each hand, and twenty-two more arranged along the edge of the platform in front of her, even the most skeptical audience is forced to admit that the professor's surmise is correct.

"I believe," says the diffident Mr. Bok, "that there are some fair likenesses of myself for sale on Chestnut Street, and I understand that they cost a quarter apiece."

My readers can depend upon it that what Mr. Bok has to say about those photographs is absolutely true.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CONCLUSION OF THE WHOLE MATTER.

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter. But first of all let us think of the many mercies for which we have to be thankful, and then let us be just as well as generous; for certainly the magazines have been of enormous benefit to the reading public as well as to those whose profession it is to entertain, amuse, or instruct that public.

The magazines have not only raised the rates of compensation for literary labor, but they have spread the reading habit to an enormous extent, and are still educating vast numbers of people — of a class

that do not read at all when they happen to be born in other countries — to become habitual buyers of books and periodicals. Moreover it must be said of the editors of these publications that they place their time at the disposal of every aspiring author who brings his manuscript to them. In other words, they give careful attention to whatever work is submitted to them, and are glad to buy and pay promptly for such stories and poems as they may deem suitable to their needs. I have never seen any disposition on the part of any of them to crush budding genius, but, on the contrary, I have frequently met them on dark, rainy nights hunting through the town with lanterns in their hands for new writers. In fact, I do not know of any place in this world where a young man may look for fairer attention and encouragement than he will find in the office of a modern magazine.

I have heard these editors denounced,

one and all, by infuriated poets and romancers, for the "favoritism" which had been shown to certain contributors, but I have generally found that when they erred in this way it was on the side of charity; and if certain writers whose contributions we generally skip occupy more room in the monthlies than we think they ought to, it is not because they are editorial pets, but because they have been careful students of the great literary principles described in these pages, and have thereby acquired the art of writing exactly what can be printed without injury to the susceptibilities of a single advertiser or subscriber.

But we have special cause for being thankful to the magazines when we read some of the hysterical, obstetrical, and epigrammatic romances which have enjoyed such an astonishing vogue in England of late years. Thank Heaven! no American magazine — so far as my know-

ledge goes—has had the effrontery to offer its readers any such noisome, diseased literature as that with which the alleged "clever" people of London have flooded our market. To my way of thinking the epigrammatic books are the most offensive of the whole lot, and certainly there is nothing better calculated to plunge one into the depths of despair and shame than the perusal of a modern British novel whose characters are forever "showing off," as children say, and who seem to devote their lives to uttering sixpenny cynicisms and evolving, with infinite pains and travail, the sort of remarks that pass current in the "smart London set"—if these chroniclers are to be believed—as wit.

Callow and ingenuous youth betrays itself by two unmistakable earmarks. One of these is in the form of a slight down on the cheek, and the other is the belief that Oscar Wilde writes brilliant epigram.

I attended the first American representation of a play by that distinguished author, and can well recall my feelings when an able-bodied mummer took the centre of the stage and said, with the air of a man who has been rolling a good thing under his tongue all the evening, and at last has a chance to utter it: "Time is the thief of procrastination." A murmur of admiration ran through the house, but I—I sobbed like a heart-broken child.

And yet Mr. Wilde is one of the cleverest of the whole brood of fat-witted chromo-cynics whose vulgar flippancies have somehow come to be regarded as witty and amusing, and that, too, by people who ought to know better. It positively makes me sick to see one of these paper-covered chronicles of fashionable imbecility lying on a parlor table, and to hear it spoken of as "so delightfully bright and clever, don't you know."

Heine was a genuine cynic and the maker of epigrams which he wrote as easily and naturally as Bobby Burns wrote verses; and if there is anything in the world which can be accomplished, if at all, without manual labor and the accompanying sweat of the brow, it is the utterance of really witty or epigrammatic remarks. But these leaden-footed English wits somehow convey to me a vision of a cynic in toil-stained overalls going forth in the gray of the early morning, dinner-pail in hand, for a hard day's work at being epigrammatic and funny.

And while I am on the subject of epigram and cynicism, I cannot help wondering what Heine would have done for a living had his lot been cast in our own age and country. Imagine him offering manuscript to the *Ladies' Home Journal!* (By the way, Bok ought not to let those photographs go for twenty-five cents apiece. They're worth a dollar if they're

worth a cent.) Think of the sensation that the *Reisebilder* would create in the *Century* office!

My own opinion is that Heine would, were he living here to-day, find occupation as a paragrapher on some Western paper, acquire some nebulous renown as the "*Ann Arbor Clarion* man" or the "*Omaha Bumblebee* man," and be consigned in his old age to that Home for Literary Incurables known as the McClure Syndicate.

There is a book of excerpts from the writings of this gifted man, published some years ago by Henry Holt & Co., and now, unhappily enough, out of print. These excerpts are so well selected and convey to us so vividly the charm of this matchless writer that I took the trouble some time ago to inquire into the way in which the work was done. I learned on undisputed authority that Mr. Holt, who has not spent his life in the literary business for nothing, borrowed a pruning-

hook from the *Century* office, placed it, together with Heine's complete works, in the hands of an experienced and skilled magazine editor, and bade him "edit" them as if they were intended for publication in his own monthly. The skilled and experienced editor opened the volumes, and the pruning-hook—also a skilled and experienced instrument of mutilation—fairly leaped from its scabbard in its eagerness to eliminate the dangerous passages. When the editor had completed his task Mr. Holt gathered up the parings from the floor and published them under the title of *Scintillations from Heine;* and I sincerely hope that a new edition of this book will be brought out before long, if for no other purpose than to show people what a real epigram is and how sharp it can bite.

There is another variety of literature which I dislike, and which seems to have attained a ranker and more unwholesome

growth in this country than elsewhere. I refer to those articles and books whose sole purpose seems to be the exploiting of men and women who are really unworthy of any serious consideration. The Johnsonian period is rich in specimens of this sort of work, and the future historian will marvel at the absurd prominence given in this enlightened age to people who have never accomplished anything in their lives, and who themselves evince the greatest eagerness to transmit to posterity authentic records of their failures.

"How I Lost the Battle," by Captain Runoff, of the Russian army; "Driven out of Asia Minor," by General Skates; and "Ever so Many Miles from the North Pole," by Lieutenant Queary, are excellent examples of this style of literature; but a far lower depth was reached about two years ago, when the Harpers burst into enthusiastic praise of a young man named Chanler, who had announced his

intention of discovering Africa, and proposed to awe and conciliate the ferocious native chiefs by performing in their presence various difficult feats of legerdemain which he had taken the pains to learn from a professional master in London.

What has become of that gifted young man for whom the Harpers predicted such a rosy future? Perhaps at this very moment he is seated in a deep, shady African jungle making an omelet in a high silk hat or converting a soiled pocket-handkerchief into a glass globe full of goldfish. I can picture him standing, alone and unarmed, before thousands of hostile spears. His eye is clear and his cheek unblanched. In another moment he will be taking rabbits out of the chieftain's ears, and the dusky warriors will cower, in abject submission, at his feet.

There is one thing that can be said in favor of Mr. Chanler, and that is that up

to the present moment he has not annoyed his fellow-creatures with any lectures or articles or stories descriptive of the wonders that he did not discover during his journeyings in the Dark Continent. His reticence is commendable, and should serve as an example to various windy travelers who "explore" during a period of eight weeks and then talk for the rest of their lives.

Verily this is a golden age for "fakirs," quacks, and intellectual feather-weights, and my friendly advice to all who may be classified under any one of those three heads is to make hay while the sun shines, because, in my belief, the coming decade will see them relegated to the obscurity in which they naturally belong. But our little tuppenny gods and celebrities have kicked up so much dust of late years that they have contrived to obscure the fame of men who are infinitely better worth talking about.

Singularly enough, the American who achieved more with his pen than any one else in his generation is almost unknown to the majority of his countrymen and countrywomen, although our government paid an unusual tribute to his memory by bringing his remains back to his native land in a man-of-war. The man of whom I write was simply a reporter employed by the *New York Herald* to chronicle contemporaneous European history. It was he who told the civilized world the truth about the atrocities committed by the Turkish invaders of Bulgaria in a series of letters to the *London Daily News*—letters which became, in the hands of Mr. Gladstone, a weapon with which he aroused the popular feeling until the Beaconsfield ministry was swept from power and the Jingo spirit held in check while Russia carried on her "holy war" against the Porte. There is not a statesman or sovereign in Europe who does not know

of the important rôle which this American reporter played in continental affairs at the time of the Russo-Turkish war. If you ask a Bulgarian or Montenegrin if he ever heard of J. A. MacGahan he will very likely say to you what one of them said to me: "Did you, an American, ever hear of George Washington? Well, MacGahan was our Washington, and there is not a peasant in all my country who is not familiar with his name."

This countryman of ours, in whose achievements I have such a sturdy pride, died literally in the harness in 1879, and every year on the 9th of June, throughout all the land of which he was the acknowledged savior, the solemn prayers of the church are offered for the repose of his soul. It may be that he has won a higher fame than he would if he had lived to make himself known to the American public through the medium of the lecture platform, but nevertheless I often wish

that his renown in the land of his birth were nearer in accord with his deserts than it is.

I doubt if any system, either literary, political, or social—unless it be negro slavery—has ever had a fairer trial in this country than has that of pruning-hook editing, of which I have treated in these pages; and that system may be responsible, in part, for the fact that three quarters of the fiction offered in book-stores to-day is the work of foreign writers, most of whom have been reared in the comparatively free and independent literary atmosphere of Great Britain, and have always addressed their books directly to the public instead of the editors of magazines. It is true that Smith or Mudie, whose influence in the book-trade is almost incalculable, occasionally refuse to circulate a novel out of consideration for the feelings of the "young person," but such a proceeding is not nearly as disas-

trous to a writer as the refusal of his manuscript by all the magazines would be to an American. A ton of manuscript makes no more commotion when returned to its authors than the touch of a humming-bird on a lily-petal; but when a book like *Esther Waters* is cast out of an English circulating library it falls with a crash that is heard throughout the length and breadth of the three kingdoms, while the author and his friends, with a little assistance from the author's enemies, make the welkin ring with their cries.

The recent discussion over "Trilby" and the action of its publishers in cutting out this passage and pruning that have given the public a little insight into the methods in vogue in our large literary establishments—methods which I have tried to explain in this book. The very fact that Mr. Du Maurier's manuscript stood in need of the pruning-hook is, to me, proof positive that he never sat on

the poets' bench in the *Ledger* office or practised his profession under the rule of Dr. Holland.

It may be that at this very moment a great many American story-readers are asking themselves why it is that native authors who know their trade so well that the magazines will publish anything that they offer should be unable to write a serial equal to that of a gray-haired novice like Mr. Du Maurier, who, I will wager, knows absolutely nothing about the immortal principles which are the very lamps unto the feet of his American contemporaries. I shudder to think of what the world would have lost had the author of "Trilby" gone about his work with the Holland fetters on his wrists, the fear of the gas-fitter in his heart, the awful pruning-hook hanging by a single hair over his head, and the ominous shadow of Robert Bonner falling across the pages of his story.

There are other English writers who have "arrived" during the past half-dozen years—a sufficient number, indeed, to make us feel that there must be some deep-seated cause for the comparatively slow progress which our own literature has made in the same time.

It is no easy matter to fairly estimate the literary worth of writers who have been before the public such a short time, especially when we take into consideration the wide difference in personal tastes, and therefore I have sought the aid of a number of critical and learned friends in the preparation of a list of writers which I confess is not exactly the one that I would print had I consulted only my own personal tastes.

This is the list which I offer as a result of many consultations with people who are supposed to understand the subject: J. M. Barrie, Mrs. Humphry Ward, Hall Caine, Rudyard Kipling, Conan Doyle,

Barry Paine, J. K. Jerome, I. Zangwill, Marie Corelli, Quiller Couch, S. R. Crockett, Sarah Grand, Beatrice Harraden, Anthony Hope, and Stanley J. Weyman—fifteen in all besides Mr. Du Maurier.

From this catalogue of talent and genius it is possible to select ten whose position in letters is assured, although tastes will differ as to the names on the last end of the list.

Now let us see how many writers have been raised to maturity in the carefully watched and over-cultivated magazine soil during the same period of time—say half a dozen years. Can we point to sixteen, or ten, or even five who have made their way into the great white light within that time?

No; we have precisely one writer to show as the fruit of American literary endeavor during six years, and that writer is a woman who has confined herself—and wisely, too, I suspect—to the por-

trayal of life and character among the New England hills and villages. A narrow field, it may be said, but she has surveyed it with the true artistic eye, and at her touch it has yielded truthful, appreciative, honest literature—stories with an underlying note of sadness that rings true as steel and is a bit of the very essence of rural New England life. Of course this writer is in an enviable position because she enjoys all the advantages of magazine authorship and the prestige which accompanies it, and is, to all practical purposes, exempt from the ordeal of the pruning-hook to which other authors are obliged to submit. I do not say this in disparagement of her great talents; I only mean to say that her stories all lie within the necessary magazine limitations, and she can write to the very top of her bent without getting within gunshot of the barbed-wire fences which restrict the endeavors of authors whose natural impulse

it is to work in the deeper and broader strata of humanity.

I do not deny that there are several bright and clever young men and women who have done excellent literary work in the magazines and will undoubtedly live to do even better in the future. I know of two or three who are, according to my way of thinking, better entitled to mention than some of the English authors whom I have named; but the woman whom I have in mind is the one recent acquisition to American letters, who draws truthful pictures from a proper point of view, writes fully as well to-day as she did six years ago, and has, moreover, given us one good novel. I do not know of a single other bright young American writer—and very clever some of them are, too—of whom nearly as much as this can be fairly said.

If the names of Hamlin Garland or Edward Bellamy occur to any of my

readers it should be remembered that they sprang up by the wayside and are not the product of the rich magazine soil.

In bringing my modest preachment to a close, it is with a hope that my readers will pardon any errors of humor into which I may have fallen, or at least find in them a reasonable excuse for my effrontery in offering advice while I am still under ninety-seven years of age. I hope that I have done full justice to the established literary dynasty which began with Robert Bonner and of which Mr. Johnson is now the acknowledged head.

And let my last word be one of thankfulness because that dynasty has at least kept our national literature clean — as clean as a whistle or a pipe-stem.

AND OTHER TALES

THE POETS' STRIKE.

It was just three o'clock on a warm day in August, and the deep silence that prevailed in the Franklin Square Prose and Verse Foundry indicated plainly that something unusual had happened. The great trip-hammer in the basement was silent; there was no whir of machinery on the upper floors; and in the vast, deserted dialect department the busy file was still. It was only in the business office that any signs of life were visible, and there the chiefs of the great establishment were gathered in anxious consultation. Their stern, determined faces indicated that they had taken a stand and had resolved to maintain it, no matter what might happen. From the street

came the faint sound of newsboys crying extras. By nightfall the tidings would be carried to the remotest corners of the town.

The poets of the Franklin Square Foundry had been ordered out on strike!

Well might the heads of the various departments look grave, for never before in the history of the factory had there been a strike in its literary department. Down in Pearl Street the poets were congregated in groups, talking over the situation and casting ominous glances at the great window, through which they could faintly distinguish the forms of the men against whose tyranny they had rebelled.

Suddenly a tall form loomed up in the centre of a large group of excited men. It was a master poet who had climbed up on some boxes to address his comrades; and they grew quiet and closed in about him to hear his words.

"Prosers, rhymesters, and dialectists," exclaimed the master poet, "the time has come for us to make a stand against the oppression of those who call themselves our masters. The time has come for the men who toil day after day in yonder tall factory to denounce the infamous system by which they are defrauded of the greater part of their wretched pittance. You know, of course, that I am speaking of the ruinous competition of scab or non-union labor. See that cart!" he cried, pointing to a square, one-horse vehicle, similar to those employed in the delivery of coal, which had been backed up against the curb in front of the factory.

"Do you know what that cart contains? See those men remove the iron scuttle on the sidewalk, and listen to the roar and rumble as the cart discharges its contents into the cellar beneath the pavement! Is that coal they are putting

in with which to feed the tireless engine that furnishes motive power to the factory? No, my friends; that is a load of jokes for the back page of *Harper's Bazar*, collected from the sweating-shops about Washington Square and Ninth Street. Do those jokes bear the union label? They do not. Many of them, no doubt, are made by Italians and Chinese, to the shame and degradation of our calling."

The master poet's words were received with a howl of rage that reached the ears of the men who were closeted in the business office, and brought a pallor to their stern, set faces.

"There is no time to be lost!" exclaimed one of the firm; "that yell of defiance convinces me that any attempt to introduce non-union poets would precipitate a riot. It will not be safe to do it unless we are prepared for the worst."

"For my part," said Mr. Harry Harper, "I believe that it would be a good policy for us to introduce machinery at once, and get rid of those poets, who are forever making new demands on us. The *Century* people have had machines in operation for some time past, and have found them very satisfactory. We must admit that a great deal of their poetry is as good as our hand-made verses."

"Do you know," cried Mr. Alden, "that that Chicago machine they put in some time ago is simply one of Armour's old sausage-mills remodeled? It is the invention of a man named Fuller, who two years ago was merely an able-bodied workman in the serial shops. It is really a very ingenious piece of mechanism, and when you think that they throw a quantity of hoofs, hair, and other waste particles from the Chicago stock-yards into a hopper, and convert them into a French or Italian serial story of firm, fine

texture — well, making a silk purse out of a sow's ear is nothing to it."

"Gentlemen," said the head of the firm, rising as he spoke, and taking from the desk beside him some large cardboard signs, "I do not propose to have my own workmen dictate to *me*. I am going to hang these signs on our front door and give employment to whomever may apply for it." The signs were thus inscribed:

HANDS WANTED

ON

SHORT STORIES.

GIRLS WANTED

FOR THE

BAZAR AND YOUNG PEOPLE.

STEADY EMPLOYMENT

FOR

SOBER, INDUSTRIOUS POETS.

TWO RHYMES TO THE QUATRAIN.

But before Mr. Harper could carry out his resolution, a young man, clad in the ordinary working-garb of a poet, hurriedly entered the office, and, placing himself before the chief, exclaimed:

"Stop, sir, before it is too late!"

"And who are you, sir?" demanded the amazed publisher.

"I am Henry Rondeau," replied the young man, "and although I am only a humble, laboring poet, I feel that I can be of assistance to you to-day. I have a grateful heart, and cannot forget your kindness to me when I was unfortunate."

"Kindness? I confess that I do not remember any—" began Mr. Harper; but

the poet interrupted him with: "Last summer, sir, when I got my fingers frost-bitten by being permitted to shake hands with Mr. Harry Harper, you not only allowed me half-pay, but gave my poor idiot sister a job in the factory as a reader of manuscript, thus enabling us to keep the wolf from the door until I was able to use a scanning-rule again."

"And a most invaluable assistant she is, too," cried Mr. Alden, warmly; "she selects all the short stories for the magazine, and I doubt if you could find, even in the office of the *Atlantic Monthly*, any one with such keen perceptions of what the public do not want as Susan Rondeau, the idiot reader of Franklin Square."

At this moment a hoarse yell arose from the crowd of strikers beneath the window, and was borne to the ears of those who were gathered in the business office.

"What does that noise mean?" demanded the senior partner, an angry

flush suffusing his cheek. "Do they think they can frighten me with yells and threats of violence? I will hang out these signs, and bid them do their worst!"

"Stop! I implore you, stop!" cried Henry Rondeau, as he threw himself before his chief. "The sight of those signs would madden them, and the counsel of the cooler heads, which has thus far controlled them, would be swept away in a moment. And then—the deluge!"

"But we do not fear even death," cried the courageous publisher.

"Mr. Harper," continued the young workman, earnestly, "at this very moment the master poet is urging them to desperate measures. He has already in his possession the address and dinner-hour of every gentleman in this room, and—"

"Well, even if dynamite is to be used—"

"And," pursued Henry Rondeau, "he has threatened to place the list in the hands of Stephen Masset!"

"Merciful heavens!" exclaimed the veteran publisher, as he sank, pale and trembling, in his easy-chair, while his associates wrung their hands in bitter despair; "can nothing be done to prevent it?"

"Yes," cried the young working-man. "Accept the offer of the Poets' Union to make a new sliding-scale. Make a few slight concessions to the men, and they will meet you half-way. Put emery wheels in the dialect shop instead of the old-fashioned cross-cut files and sandpaper that now take up so much of the men's time. Let one rhyme to the quatrain be sufficient at the metrical benches, and — it is a little thing, but it counts — buy some tickets for the poets' picnic and summer-night's festival at Snoozer's Grove, which takes place next Monday afternoon and evening."

Henry Rondeau's advice was taken, and to-day the great trip-hammer is at work in the basement of the foundry, and the

poets and prose-writers are busy at their benches on the upper floors. The master poet is at work among the rest, and sometimes he chuckles as he thinks of the concessions that were wrung from the foundry-owners by the great August strike. But little does the master poet dream of the vengeance that awaits him —of the awful midnight oath taken by Joseph Harper after he had signed the treaty with his employees.

Not until after death will that oath be fulfilled. Not until the members of the Poets' Union have borne the remains of their chief to Calvary with a following as numerous as that which accompanies the deceased aunt of a Broadway janitor to her last resting-place—not until then will the surviving members of the firm carry out the sacred trust imposed upon them.

They will collect the poems of the master poet and publish them in a mouse-colored volume—*edited by Arthur Stedman.*

ANCIENT FORMS OF AMUSEMENT.

(*From the Hypnotic Gazette, January* 1, A.D. 2203.)

WORKMEN employed on the mesmeric dredge near what was in old times the bed of the Harlem River discovered yesterday a leaden box in which was the following manuscript, which gives us a vivid idea of the crude condition of the drama toward the close of the nineteenth century:

"FUN ON THE ROOF."

Farce Comedy in Three Acts.

ACT

SCENE. *A garden with practicable gate R. U. E.*

SPARKLE MCINTYRE (*entering through gate*). Well, this is a pretty state of affairs! Rosanna Harefoot lived only for

me until that theatrical troupe came to town; but now she's so stuck on singing and dancing and letting those actor men make love to her that I can't get a moment with her. Hello! here comes the whole company. I guess they're going to rehearse here. I'll hide behind this tree and watch them do their acts.

Enter company of PLAYERS.

FIRST PLAYER. Well, this is a hot day; but while we're trying to keep cool Miss Kitty Socks will sing "Under the Daisies."

(*Specialties by the entire company.*)

FIRST PLAYER. Well, we'd better hurry away down the street, or else we'll be late.

[*Exeunt* OMNES.

SPARKLE MCINTYRE (*emerging from behind tree*). That looks easy enough. I guess I'll see what I can do myself.

(*Specialties.*)

FIRST PLAYER (*entering with company*). Now that rehearsal is over, we'll have a little fun for a few moments.

SPARKLE (*aside*). Rosanna will be mine yet.

(*Grand Finale.*)

CURTAIN.

ACT II.

SCENE. *Parlor of* SPARKLE MCINTYRE'S *house;* SPARKLE *discovered seated at table with brilliant dressing-gown on.*

SPARKLE. I invited all that theatrical company to spend the evening with me; but I'm afraid they won't come. I just wanted to surprise them with that new song and dance of mine. Ah! here they come now.

Enter THEATRICAL COMPANY.

FIRST PLAYER. We are a little late, Mr. McIntyre, but the fact is I had to go to the steamer to meet some friends of

mine who were coming over to try their luck in glorious America; and as they're all perfect ladies and gentlemen, I took the liberty of bringing them along. Allow me to introduce them to you: Mr. and Mrs. Lorenzo Sirocco and the Miss Siroccos from the Royal Alhambra in Rooshy.

SPARKLE. Ladies and gentlemen, I'm pleased to meet you; and now, if you'll favor us with an act, we'll be greatly obliged.

(*Specialties by everybody, and Finale.*)

CURTAIN.

ACT III.

SCENE. *Same as Act I.*

Enter ROSANNA.

ROSANNA. This is the very garden where I used to meet my own true Sparkle. In fact, it's right here that he used to *spark* me. Well, while I'm feeling so

downhearted, I'll do a little dance just to cheer myself up.

(*Specialties by* ROSANNA.)

SPARKLE (*entering*). What! *you* here, Rosanna? Then you must love me.

ROSANNA. Yes, Sparkle, I do.

SPARKLE (*embracing her*). Then, darling, we will be married this very day. Call the neighbors all in, and we will sing, dance, and be merry.

Enter COMPANY.

(*Specialties.*)

CURTAIN.

THE SOBER, INDUSTRIOUS POET,

AND HOW HE FARED AT EASTER-TIME.

"ALAS, Mary!" exclaimed William Sonnet, as he entered his neat but humble tenement apartment a few days before the close of Lent, "I fear that our Pfingst holiday this year will be anything but a merry one. My employers have notified me that if they receive any more complaints of the goods from my department they will give me the sack."

William Sonnet was certainly playing in hard luck, although it would be difficult to find in the whole of Jersey City a more industrious, sober young poet, or a more devoted husband and father. For nine years he had been employed in the

Empire Prose and Verse Foundry, the largest literary establishment on the banks of the Hackensack, where by sheer force of sobriety and industry he had risen from the humble position of cash-boy at the hexameter counter to that of foreman of the dialect floor, where forty-five hands were kept constantly employed on prose and verse. During these years his relations with his employers, Messrs. Rime & Reeson, had been of the pleasantest nature until about six months previous to the opening of this story, when they began — unjustly, as it seemed to him — to find fault with the goods turned out by his department. There were complaints received at the office every day, they said, of both the dialect stories and verses that bore the Empire brand.

The *Century Magazine* had returned a large invoice of hand-sewed negro dialect verses of the "Befoh de Wah" variety, and a syndicate which supplied the West-

ern market had canceled all its spring orders on the ground that the dialect goods had for some reason or other fallen far below the standard maintained in the other departments of the Empire Foundry. William was utterly unable to account for this change in the quality of the manuscript prepared on his floor, and as he sat with his bowed head resting on his toil-hardened hand, and the sweat and grime of honest labor on his brow, he looked, indeed, the very picture of dejection.

"William," said his wife, as she placed a caressing hand on his forehead, "you have enemies in the foundry whom you do not suspect. You must know that when you wooed and won me a year ago I had been courted by no less than four different poets who at that time were employed at the Eagle Verse Works in Newark, but have since found positions with Messrs. Rime & Reeson. I will not

deny, William, that I toyed with the affections of those poets, but it was because I deemed them as frivolous as myself, and when they went from my presence with angry threats on their lips I laughed in merry glee. But when I saw them standing together on street-corners, with their heads together in earnest conversation, I grew sick at heart, for I knew it boded us no good. Be warned, William, by my words."

The next day, when the whistle blew at noon, William Sonnet ate his dinner from his tin pail as usual; but then, instead of going out into the street to play baseball with the poets from the adjacent factories, as the Empire Foundry employees generally did, he took a quiet stroll through the whole establishment, under the pretense of looking for an envoy that had been knocked off the end of a ballade.

In the packing-department was a large

consignment of goods from his floor ready for shipment, and he stopped to examine the burr of a Scotch magazine story to make sure that it had not been rubbed off by carelessness. What was his surprise to find that the dialect, which he himself had gone over with a cross-cut file that very morning, was now worn completely smooth by contact with an emery-wheel! He replaced the story carefully in the fine sawdust in which it was packed, and then examined the other goods. They had not yet been touched, but it was evident to him that the miscreants fully intended to finish the destructive work which they had only had time to begin. Returning to his own bench, he passed two or three poets who were talking earnestly together, and by straining his ears he heard one of them whisper:

"We'll finish the job to-night. Meet me at ten."

That was enough for William Sonnet.

He determined, without delay, what course to pursue.

At half-past nine that evening, three mysterious figures draped in black cloaks entered the Empire Prose and Verse Foundry by a side door. William Sonnet was one of the three, and the others were his employers, Messrs. Rime & Reeson. He led them to a place of concealment which commanded a full view of the packing-room. Before long stealthy footsteps were heard, and the four conspirators entered.

"Listen," said the eldest of the quartet, as he threw the light from his dark lantern on the sullen faces of his companions; "you all know why we are here. This night we will complete William Sonnet's ruin, and Easter Monday will find him hunting for work in Paterson and Newark, and hunting in vain. Why is he foreman of the dialect department, while we toil at the bench for a mere crust?

Mary Birdseye is now his bride; but when we wooed her we were rejected like our own poems."

"And that, too, although we inclosed no postage," retorted the second poet, bitterly.

"Now to work," continued the first speaker, as he stooped to examine some goods on the floor. "What have we here? A serial for the *Atlantic Monthly?* Well, we'll soon fix that," and in another moment he had injected a quantity of ginger into the story, ruining it completely. Then the work of destruction went on, while Messrs. Rime & Reeson watched the vandals with horror depicted on their faces. A pan of sweepings from the humorous department, designed for Harper's "Editor's Drawer" and the *Bazar*, was thrown away, and real funny jokes substituted for them. A page article for the Sunday supplement of a New York daily, entitled "Millionaires who have

Gold Filling in their Teeth," embellished with cuts of twenty different jaws, was thrown out, and an article on "Jerusalem the Golden," ordered by the *Whited Sepulchre*, substituted.

Messrs. Rime & Reeson could control themselves no longer. Stacked against the wall like a woodpile were the twelve instalments of a *Century* serial by Amelia E. Barr, which had been sawed into the proper lengths that afternoon. Seizing one of these apiece, the three men made a sudden onslaught on the miscreants and beat them into insensibility. Then they bound them securely and delivered them over to the tormentors.

As for honest William Sonnet, he was made foreman of the whole foundry; and his wife, who was a fashion-writer, and therefore never fit to be seen, received a present of two beautiful new tailor-made dresses, which fitted her so well that no one recognized her, and she opened a new

line of credit at all the stores in the neighborhood.

It was a happy family that sat down to the Easter dinner in William Sonnet's modest home; and to make their joy complete, before the repast was ended an envelope arrived from William's grateful employers containing an appointment for his bedridden mother-in-law as reader for a large publishing-house.

THE TWO BROTHERS;

OR, PLUCKED FROM THE BURNING.

"No, Herbert, I would advise you to tear up that card and put temptation away from you. If you yield now you will weaken your moral character, and you will have less strength to resist another time."

The speaker, a young man of grave, honest aspect, was standing with his hand laid in a kindly way on his younger brother's shoulder. The latter, whose face was cast in a more delicate and a weaker mould, stood irresolutely twirling in his hand a card of invitation to an afternoon tea.

"I don't see what harm it will do just for this one time," he said, pettishly.

"You're always preaching about temptation, John; but, for my part, I think it's my duty as a writer to see a little of every side of life. I want to write a novel some day and to have one of the scenes laid at a kettledrum. How can I describe one unless I see it myself?"

"I hope, Herbert," said the elder brother, mildly, "that you will never sink so low as to write a New York Society novel; but that is surely what you will come to if you abandon yourself to the pernicious habit of attending afternoon teas. Do you remember your old playfellow, Walter Weakfish? It is only three years since he began to sip tea at kettledrums. At that time he was considered one of the very best reporters in the city, while at the poker table he commanded universal respect. You know, of course, that his downward career has been very rapid since his first fall, and that he has sounded every depth of ignominy and

shame; but do you know where he is now?"

"I heard some time ago," replied Herbert, "that he had become an habitual frequenter of the most exclusive musical circles in Boston, and that—"

"No," interrupted the elder; "that was a malicious report. It is true that he once attended an organ recital, but that was all. At present he is conducting, over his own signature, a department entitled 'Old Uncle Squaretoes's Half-hour Chats with the Little Folks,' in a Philadelphia paper."

"Merciful heavens!" cried Herbert; "I had no idea it was as bad as that; but can nothing be done to save him?"

"I fear not," replied the elder brother, sadly; "and now, Herbert, I shall say no more. You must choose your own course; but remember that our poker club meets to-night in the room over Cassidy's Exchange, and you must—"

"Yes, and drop another double X," exclaimed Herbert, bitterly.

"And learn the great lesson of life," said John, "that in this vale of tears the hand that shapes our destiny will ofttimes beat three of a kind."

And with these impressive words John Dovetail departed, leaving his brother still twirling the engraved card between his fingers and hesitating.

"Pshaw!" he exclaimed at last, "I don't care what John says. I'm sick of his preaching, anyhow; and besides I'm not going to get the Society habit fastened on me through just one kettledrum! I'll go there just to see what it's like."

* * * * *

That afternoon Herbert tasted of the forbidden intoxicant of feminine flattery, drank five cups of tea, and ate four pieces of sticky cake. He was introduced to a leader of the Chromo Literary Set, who told him that she "adored clever men,"

and begged him to come to her next Sunday evening reception. Then he allowed himself to be patronized by a dude who copied letters in a broker's office by day and led the cotillion by night; and he had not been in the drawing-room half an hour before his mind became affected by the "Society talk" going on about him to such a degree that he found himself chuckling in a knowing manner at an idiotic story about Ollie Winkletree, of the Simian Club.

It was at this moment that the warning words of his brother John suddenly came back to him, and he realized that it was time to go.

He had no appetite for dinner that night—the tea and the sticky cake had done their work; and instead of joining the poker class over Cassidy's Exchange, he sat down by the fire to brood over the new life that was opening before him. The Society bee—the most malevolent

insect in the world's hive—had stung him under his bonnet, the poison was already in his veins, and when John returned at midnight from the poker meeting his brother addressed him as "deah boy."

Now John Dovetail had always looked after his younger brother with the same solicitude that he would have bestowed upon a helpless child, and to-night there was an anxious look in his face as he seated himself by the open fire and drew from his vest-pocket the cigar which he had won by throwing dice with Cassidy at the Exchange. He was prepared to enjoy himself for a half-hour in that peace of mind which an easy conscience alone can give. His evening had been well spent—thanks to that merciful dispensation which has ordained that even the vilest sinner shall fill a bobtail flush once in a while—and yet, as he sat there before the glowing embers, dark mis-

givings filled his mind. Older than his brother by fully four years, and of infinitely wider experience and knowledge of the world, he knew only too well the danger that lurked in the leaves of the five-o'clock tea.

"Alas!" he said to himself, "I hear that the Swelled Head is very prevalent this winter. It is contagious, and there is no place—not even an amateur theatrical company—where one is so sure to be exposed to it as at a kettledrum. Suppose, after my years of watchful care, my poor brother were to be taken down with it!"

* * * * *

The weeks rolled on, and Herbert, having once yielded to temptation, soon found it almost impossible to control his appetite for Society functions. Not only had he formed as undesirable a list of acquaintances as he could have made by heading the cotillion for three seasons,

but he even had the temerity to tell his brother John—whose life was still one of noble purpose and lofty endeavor—that he wondered how he could spend all his evenings playing poker in the room over Cassidy's Exchange, instead of—

"Instead of what, Herbert?" demanded John, in clear, ringing accents. "Instead of doing as you have been doing ever since you took your first plunge into the maelstrom of tea and cake and lemonade that is fast whirling you to destruction? No, Herbert, I have watched you day by day, and I have noted the change that has gradually come over you. For weeks past you have been gradually growing apart from me and from your old-time associates, and have affiliated yourself with a class of people who are far beneath you. Where were you last night at the hour when you should have been opening jack-pots in the room over Cassidy's Ex-

change? You were up-town skipping the tralaloo."

Herbert started and grew pale. "How did you find that out?" he asked, hoarsely.

"And whose tralaloo were you skipping?" continued John, sternly, without heeding the interruption. "You were tralalooing with the De Sneides of Steenth Street, and you dare not deny it!"

"Well!" exclaimed the younger brother, "I don't see any harm in that. Isn't the De Sneide family all right?"

John Dovetail's clear, honest eyes blazed with anger. Then with a great effort he controlled himself, and went on in a voice which trembled a little in spite of him.

"All right? Herbert Dovetail, do you dare to stand before me and to talk about the De Sneides being all right, when you yourself told me that they concocted from a half-pint of Santa Cruz rum—a half-pint, mind you—a beverage which they

served to over one hundred human souls? And did they not add to this crime that of blasphemy, by calling it punch? O Herbert! Do you know what will happen if you keep on in the path which you have chosen? You will become the victim of that awful form of paresis known as the Swelled Head. Already I have noticed symptoms of it in you."

"Oh, pshaw!" cried Herbert, impatiently; "just as soon as a man begins to go into Society a little you say he's got the Swelled Head. It's simply because you're jealous of my success—but what's the matter, John? Are you ill?"

For his brother was leaning against the table, his hand pressed to his heart and his face white with an awful fear.

"Merciful heavens!" John exclaimed; "a sure and unfailing sign; the poor boy is stricken already and does not know it. But he shall be saved!"

* * * * *

One night John persuaded his brother to attend a meeting of the poker class, by telling him that two German gentlemen who had played the game just enough to think they knew it all were going to be present.

Herbert accepted the invitation chiefly because he knew he would not meet any one he had borrowed money from, and was given a kindly welcome by his old associates, although, owing to the peculiar nature of his disease, he had failed to recognize several of them when he met them in the street the week before.

To be sure, he cast a slight gloom over the company by calling for sherry when the rest of the company were drinking the old stuff; but that was pardoned because of his unfortunate tea-drinking propensities, and the game went on merrily.

Something of the old light came back into the boy's eye as the pile of chips in

front of him began to grow apace; and the old glad smile lit up his face once more as Baron Snoozer laid down two big pair only to be confronted by Herbert's three little fellows.

And yet still he called for sherry.

But it is always the unexpected that happens. Just as the game broke up the waiter informed John Dovetail that there was a gentleman down-stairs who wished to see him.

"Show him up!" cried John, pleasantly, as he cashed in his chips.

The stranger appeared and John arose to greet him. He wore a large chrysanthemum in his buttonhole and held a macaroon in his hand, which he nibbled from time to time. His make-up was that of a dude.

"You do not know me, I fear," he said to John. "I am sadly changed, I know; but the time was, gentlemen, when I sat at this very table; and, oh, how I would

have enjoyed a night like this!" he added, glancing significantly at the rueful faces of the two German gentlemen, who were turning their pockets inside out.

All the members of the club were now listening with intense interest; and John began with, "Your face, sir, seems strangely familiar—"

"Wait," said the visitor, with a sad smile, "until you hear my story. Once, as I said before, I sat in this very game nearly every night; but now what am I? One day—it was five years ago—some fiend incarnate led me all unknowing to a reception in an artist's studio. Tea was ordered—I partook of it and was lost. Since then I have gone down, down, down; and to-morrow I leave this city forever. There is but one thing left for me to do. You will see me no more after to-night. Do none of you remember Walter Weakfish?"

"Walter Weakfish!" gasped John.

"Why, I thought you were in Philadelphia, doing the 'Old Uncle'—"

"No," replied the unhappy young man, "I have been worse than that. I have been a Society reporter. Yes, it is I who have written about the lovely 'Spriggie' Stone and the queenly Mrs. 'Jack' Astorbilt, who wore a passementerie of real lace down the front breadth of her moire antique gown. I wrote about those people so much that finally I imagined that I knew them; and then I borrowed money from people who did know them, and ordered clothes from their tailors, until now Avenue A is my favorite thoroughfare. And now I must leave the city forever; but, Herbert, do you take warning from the wreck you see before you now. Good-by, my old friends!" And Walter Weakfish started for the door.

"Stay!" cried John. "Can we do nothing for you? Shall we never see you again?"

"No," replied Walter, pausing for a moment on the threshold, "never again; for I am going to Washington to patrol the great national free-lunch route which they call Official Society, and to write correspondence for the Western papers. After that, the morgue."

The door closed, and he was gone. Then a moment's silence was broken by a wail of anguish from Herbert.

"Thank Heaven!" cried John, "his heart is touched, and he is saved. Everybody in the room have something with me."

And before morning the swelling in Herbert's head was reduced so rapidly that he had to drink thirteen hot Scotches to counteract it. And from that day to this he has never been to another kettledrum, nor taken anything stronger than rye whisky.

THE STORY OF THE YOUNG MAN OF TALENT.

ONCE upon a time there was a Young Man of Talent, whose stories were so good that the editor of the paper on which he was employed heard the Professional Humorist, who had been attached to the paper for twenty-eight years, ask the city editor, "what the deuce the old man meant by loading up the Sunday supplement with all that stuff;" and the very next night the Young Man asked if he might sign his name to his special articles in the Sunday paper. Now this was a privilege which had never been accorded to anybody who knew how to write, and the editor was

afraid to make an exception in favor of the Young Man for fear of bringing down upon his own head the wrath of the prize-fighters, skirt-dancers, prominent citizens, and other windbags who had always regarded signed articles as their special prerogative.

So he made answer that the signature was usually considered a badge of shame. But the Young Man persisted in his demand until the editor was forced to give way, and the following Sunday the eyes of the Professional Humorist fell upon an article which bore the signature of the Young Man of Talent, and which was sandwiched in between a graphic description of "How I Slugged McGonegal's Unknown," by Rocksey McIntyre, and "The Spontaneity of Mediæval Art," by Professor Stuffe.

A jealous, angry light gleamed in the eyes of the Professional Humorist, and he swore an awful oath to be revenged

on the rival who had come into the field with a variety of humor that would inevitably put an end to his own calling — that of manufacturing "crisp paragraphs" — which he had pursued without interruption for more than a quarter of a century.

Now the Professional Humorist belonged to the "Association of Old-time Funny Men," to which nobody could gain admittance who was under fifty-five years of age or who had ever been guilty of an original piece of humor.

When one of the order wrote a crisp paragraph about a door being not a door when it happened to be ajar, it would become the duty of some fellow-member to quote it with the prefix: "Billy Jaggs of the *Blankburgh Banner* says—" and add some refined pleasantry of this sort: "Billy's mouth is usually ajar when the whisky-jug goes round. How is that for high, Jaggsey, old boy?" and then the

crisp paragraph would be "passed along" after the fashion prevalent in the old days when American humor was struggling for popular recognition.

So the Professional Humorist communicated with his fellow funny men, and told them that unless concerted measures were taken the old-fashioned crisp paragraphs would be relegated to the obscurity shared by other features of ante-bellum journalism; and, the funny men becoming alarmed, a general convention of the order was promptly called and as quickly assembled.

At this gathering of the comic writers various means whereby the Young Man of Talent should be destroyed were discussed.

"It would be better," said a hoary and solemn humorist, whose calling was indicated by a cane made in imitation of a length of stovepipe, with a handle of goat's horn, "much better, I think, if we

were to prevail upon him to enter Society as a literary celebrity, and make a practice of attending kettledrums and receptions, where he will be encouraged by women to talk about his literary methods, and where he will be tempted to partake of the tea and cake and weak punch which have ruined so many brilliant careers. If, in addition to that, we can arrange with the Society reporters to publish his name among 'the well-known literary and artistic people present' as often as possible, his descent will be swift and sure."

"There is one thing necessary to make that combination invincible," said a paragrapher whose sound logic and conservatism had long since gained for him the name of "The Sage of Schoharie": "we must call the attention of somebody like Mr. Aldrich or Mr. Howells to his work, and induce him to express a favorable opinion of it. If Mr. Aldrich would only

say that he has a 'dainty style,' or if Mr. Howells would praise him for his 'subtle delineation of character,' his book, which is coming out in a few weeks, would fall flat on the market. Then, if he showed any signs of life after that, Edmund Gosse might administer the *coup de grâce* with a favorable review in some English fortnightly."

These measures having received the indorsement of every member of the union, it was resolved that they should be promptly carried through; but before the meeting adjourned the Professional Humorist arose and begged to be allowed to say a few words.

"I have no doubt," he said, "that the course we have decided upon will result in driving this new-comer from the field of letters; but if it does not I have a plan in my head which has never failed yet. It has already, within my own memory, driven several of our most promising

writers to the Potter's Field, and if desperate measures become necessary we will try it, but only as a last resort."

* * * * *

A year rolled by, and again the members of the union assembled for their annual convention.

As they passed through Fourteenth Street on their way to the hall of meeting, a sad-eyed, despondent figure stood on the sidewalk and endeavored to sell them lead-pencils at their own price. A smile of triumph lit up the face of the Professional Humorist as he directed the attention of his fellow-members to the mournful, ill-clad wretch on the curbstone. "I told you my scheme would work," he said.

It was even so. Neither the kettle-drums nor the commendations of the wiseacres of literature had had any effect on the Young Man of Talent, who had gone steadily on with his work, unspoiled

by feminine flattery, and heedless of the praise or commendations of the critics.

It was only when these attempts upon his reputation and popularity had failed that the Professional Humorist threw himself into the breach with a paragraph —which was given instant and wide publicity by the rest of the Association— stating that the gifted young writer was *the Dickens of America.*

And then the Young Man of Talent tottered to his fall.

THE SOCIETY REPORTER'S CHRISTMAS.

EARLY morn in the little parlor of a humble white cottage, where Susan Swallowtail sat waiting for her husband to return from the ball. It lacked but a few days of Christmas, and she had arisen with her little ones at five o'clock in order that William, her husband, might have a warm breakfast and a loving greeting on his return after his long night's work.

Seated before the fire, with her sewing on her lap, Susan Swallowtail's thoughts went back to the days when William, then on the threshold of his career as a Society reporter, had first won her young heart by his description of her costume at the ball

of the "Ladies' Daughters' Association of the Ninth Ward." She remembered how gallantly and tenderly he had wooed her through the columns of the four weekly and Sunday papers in which he conducted the "Fashion Chit-chat" columns, and then the tears filled her eyes as memory brought once more before her the terrible night when William came to the house and asked her father, the stern old house and sign painter, for his daughter's hand.

"And yet," said Susan to herself, "my life has not been altogether an unhappy one in spite of our poverty. William has a kind heart, and I am sure that if he had anything to wear besides his dress-suit and flannel dressing-gown he would often brighten my lot by taking me out somewhere in the daytime. Ah, if papa would only relent! But I fear he will never forgive me for my marriage."

Her thoughts were interrupted by the sound of familiar footsteps in the hall,

and the next moment her husband had clasped her in his arms, while the children clung to his ulster and clamored for their early morning kiss.

But there was a cloud on the young husband's brow and a tremor on his lips as he said, "Run away now, little ones; papa and mama have something to say to each other that little ears must not hear."

"My darling," he said, as soon as they were alone, "I fear that our Christmas will not be a very merry one. You know how we always depend on the ball of the Gilt-edged Coterie for our Christmas dinner?"

"Indeed I do," replied the young wife, with a bright smile; "what beautiful slices of roast beef and magnificent mince-pies you always bring home from that ball! Surely they will give their entertainment on Christmas eve this year as they always have?"

"Yes, but—can you bear to hear it, my own love?"

"Let me know the worst," said the young wife, bravely.

"Then," said William, hoarsely, "I will tell you. I am not going to that ball. The city editor is going to take the assignment himself, and I must go to a literary and artistic gathering, where there will be nothing but tea and recitations."

"Yes," said Susan, bitterly, "and sandwiches so thin that they can be used to watch the eclipse of the sun. But what have you brought back with you now? I hope it is something nourishing."

"My darling," replied William Swallowtail, in faltering tones, "I fear you are doomed to another disappointment. I have done my best to-night, but this is all I could get my hands on;" and with these words he drew from the pockets of his heavy woolen ulster a paper bag filled

with wine jelly, a box of *marrons glacés*, and two pint bottles of champagne.

"Is that all?" said Susan, reproachfully. "The children have had nothing to eat since yesterday morning except *pâtés de foie gras*, macaroons, and hothouse grapes. All day long they have been crying for corned-beef sandwiches, and I have had none to give them. You told me, William, when we parted in the early evening, that you were going to a house where there would be at least ham, and perhaps bottled beer, and now you return to me with this paltry package of jelly and that very sweet wine. I hope, William"—and a cold, hard look of suspicion crept into her face—"that you have not forgotten your vows and given to another—"

"Susan!" cried William Swallowtail, "how can you speak or even think of such a thing, when you know full well that—"

But Susan withdrew from his embrace,

and asked in bitter, cold accents, "Was there ham at that reception or was there not?"

"There was ham, and corned beef too. I will not deny it; but—"

"Then, William, with what woman have you shared it?" demanded the young wife, drawing herself up to her full height, and fixing her dark, flashing eyes full upon him.

"Susan, I implore you, listen to me, and do not judge me too harshly. There *was* ham, but there were several German noblemen there too—Baron Sneeze of the Austrian legation, Count Pretzel, and a dozen more. The smell of meat inflamed them, and I fought my way through them in time to save only this from the wreck."

He drew from his ulster-pocket something done up in a piece of paper, and handed it to his wife. She opened the package and saw that it contained what

looked like a long piece of very highly polished ivory. Then her face softened, her lips trembled, and her eyes brimmed over with tears. "Forgive me, William, for my unjust suspicions," she exclaimed, as she threw herself once more into his arms. "This mute ham-bone tells me far more strongly than any words of yours could the story of the Society reporter's awful struggle for life."

William kissed his young wife affectionately, and then sat down to the breakfast which she had prepared for him.

"I hope," she said, cheerfully, as she took a dish of lobster salad from the oven, where it had been warmed over, "that you will keep a sharp lookout for quail this week. It would be nice to have one or two for our Christmas dinner. Of course we cannot afford corned beef and cabbage like those rich people whom you call by their first names when you write about them in the Sunday papers; but I

do hope we will not be obliged to put up with cakes and pastry and such wretched stuff."

"Quail!" exclaimed her husband; "they are so scarce and shy this winter that we are obliged to take setter-dogs with us to the entertainments at which they are served. But I will do my best, darling."

As soon as William had gone to bed Susan took from its hiding-place the present which she had prepared for her husband, and proceeded to sew it to the inside of his ulster as a Christmas surprise for him. She sighed to think that it was the best she could afford this year. It was a useful rather than an ornamental gift—a simple rubber pocket, made from a piece of an old mackintosh, and intended for William to carry soup in.

But Susan had a bright, hopeful spirit, and a smile soon smoothed the furrows from her face as she murmured, "How nice it will be when William comes home

with his new pocket filled with nice, warm, nourishing bouillon!" and then she glanced up from her work and saw that her daughter, little golden-haired Eva, had entered the room and was looking at her out of her great, truthful, deep-blue eyes.

* * * * *

It was Christmas eve, and as Jacob Scaffold trudged through the frosty streets the keen air brought a ruddy glow to his cheeks and tipped his nose with a brighter carmine than any that he used in the practice of his art. Entering the hall in which the ball of the Gilt-edged Coterie was taking place, the proud old house and sign painter quickly divested himself of his outer wraps and made his way to the committee-room.

Then, adorned with a huge badge and streamer, he strolled out to greet his friends, who were making merry on the polished floor of the ball-room. But al-

though the band played its most stirring measures and the lights gleamed on arms and necks of dazzling whiteness, old Jacob Scaffold sighed deeply as he seated himself in a rather obscure corner and allowed his eyes to roam about the room as if in search of some familiar face.

The fact was that the haughty, purse-proud old man was thinking of another Christmas eve ten years before when his daughter Susan had danced at this same ball, the brightest, the prettiest, and the most sought-after girl on the floor.

"And to think," said the old man to himself, "that, with all the opportunities she had to make a good match, she should have taken up with that reporter in the shiny dress-suit! It's five years since I've heard anything of her, but of late I've been thinking that maybe I was too harsh with her, and perhaps—"

His thoughts were interrupted by the arrival of a servant, who told him that

some one desired to see him in the committee-room. On reaching that apartment he found a little girl of perhaps eight years of age, plainly clad, and carrying a basket in her hand. Fixing her eyes on Jacob Scaffold, she said:

"Please, sir, are you the chairman of the press committee?"

"I am," replied the puzzled artist; "but who are you?"

"I am the reporter of the *Sunday Guff*. My papa has charge of the 'What the Four Hundred are Doing' column, but to-night he is obliged to attend a chromo-literary reception, where there will be nothing to eat but tea and cake. Papa has reported your balls and chowder excursions for the past five years, and we have always had ham for dessert for a week afterward. We had all been looking forward to your Christmas-eve ball, and when papa told us that he would have to go to the tea and cake place to-

night mama felt so badly that I took papa's ticket out of his pocket when he was asleep and came here myself. Papa has a thick ulster, full of nice big pockets, that he puts on when he goes out to report, but I have brought a basket."

The child finished her simple and affecting narrative, and the members of the press committee looked at one another dumfounded. Jacob Scaffold was the first to break the silence.

"And what is your name, little child?" he inquired.

"Eva Swallowtail," she answered, as she turned a pair of trusting, innocent blue eyes full upon him.

The old man grew pale and his lips trembled as he gathered his grandchild in his arms. The other members of the committee softly left the room, for they all knew the story of Susan Scaffold's *mésalliance* and her father's bitter feelings toward her and her husband.

"What!" cried Jacob Scaffold, "my grandchild wanting bread? Come to me, little one, and we'll see what can be done for you."

And putting on his heavy ulster he took little Eva by the hand and led the way to the great thoroughfare, on which the stores were still open.

* * * * *

It was a happy family party that sat down to dinner in William Swallowtail's humble home that bright Christmas day, and well did the little ones enjoy the treat which their generous new-found grandparent provided for them. They began with a soup made of wine jelly, and ended with a delicious dessert of corned-beef sandwiches and large German pickles; and then, when they could eat no more, and not even a pork pie could tempt their appetites, Grandpa Scaffold told his daughter that he was willing to lift his son-in-law from the hard and

ill-paid labor of writing Society chronicles, and give him a chance to better himself with a whitewash brush. "And," continued the old man, "if I see that he possesses true artistic talent, I will some day give him a chance at the side of a house."

THE DYING GAG.

THERE was an affecting scene on the stage of a New York theatre the other night—a scene invisible to the audience and not down on the bills, but one far more touching and pathetic than anything enacted before the footlights that night, although it was a minstrel company that gave the entertainment.

It was a wild, blustering night, and the wind howled mournfully around the street-corners, blinding the pedestrians with the clouds of dust that it caught up from the gutters and hurled into their faces.

Old man Sweeny, the stage doorkeeper, dozing in his little glazed box, was awakened by a sudden gust that banged the

stage door and then went howling along the corridor, almost extinguishing the gas-jets and making the minstrels shiver in their dressing-rooms.

"What! you here to-night?" exclaimed old man Sweeny as a frail figure muffled up in a huge ulster staggered through the doorway and stood leaning against the wall, trying to catch his breath.

"Yes; I felt that I couldn't stay away from the footlights to-night. They tell me I'm old and worn out and had better take a rest, but I'll go on till I drop;" and with a hollow cough the Old Gag plodded slowly down the dim and drafty corridor, and sank wearily on a sofa in the big dressing-room, where the other Gags and Conundrums were awaiting their cues.

"Poor old fellow!" said one of them, sadly, "he can't hold out much longer."

"He ought not to go on except at matinées," replied another veteran, who

was standing in front of the mirror trimming his long, silvery beard; and just then an attendant came in with several basins of gruel, and the old Jests tucked napkins under their chins and sat down to partake of a little nourishment before going on.

The bell tinkled and the entertainment began. One after another the Jokes and Conundrums heard their cues, went on, and returned to the dressing-room; for they all had to go on again in the afterpiece. The house was crowded to the dome, and there was scarcely a dry eye in the vast audience as one after another of the old Quips and Jests that had been treasured household words in many a family came on and then disappeared to make room for others of their kind.

As the evening wore on the whisper ran through the theatre that the Old Gag was going on that night—perhaps for the last time; and many an eye grew

dim, many a pulse beat quicker at the thought of listening once more to that hoary Jest, about whose head were clustered so many sacred memories.

Meanwhile the Old Gag was sitting in his corner of the dressing-room, his head bowed on his breast, his gruel untasted on the tray before him. The other Gags came and went, but he heeded them not. His thoughts were far away. He was dreaming of old days, of his early struggles for fame, and of his friends and companions of years ago. "Where are they now?" he asked himself, sadly. "Some are wanderers on the face of the earth, in comic operas. Two of them found ignoble graves in the 'Tourists'' company. Others are sleeping beneath the daisies in Harper's 'Editor's Drawer.'"

"You're called, sir!"

The Old Gag awoke from his reverie, and started to his feet with something of the old-time fire flashing in his eye.

Throwing aside his heavy ulster, he staggered to the entrance and stood there patiently waiting for his cue.

"You're hardly strong enough to go on to-night," said a Merry Jest, touching him kindly on the arm; but the gray-bearded one shook him off, saying hoarsely:

"Let be! let be! I must read those old lines once more—it may be for the last time."

And now a solemn hush fell upon the vast audience as a sad-faced minstrel uttered in tear-compelling accents the most pathetic words in all the literature of minstrelsy:

"And so you say, Mr. Johnson, that all the people on the ship were perishing of hunger, and yet you were eating fried eggs. How do you account for that?"

For one moment a deathlike silence prevailed. Then the Old Gag stepped forward and in clear, ringing tones replied:

"The ship lay to, and I got one."

A wild, heart-rending sob came from the audience and relieved the tension as the Old Gag staggered back into the entrance and fell into the friendly arms that were waiting to receive him.

Sobbing Conundrums bore him to a couch in the dressing-room. Weeping Jokes strove in vain to bring back the spark of life to his inanimate form. But all to no avail.

The Old Gag was dead.

"ONLY A TYPE-WRITER."

SCENE. *Cave of the experienced* MANAGER *in the centre of a labyrinth under the stage.*

MANAGER (*to energetic young* DRAMATIST *who has tracked him to his lair*). Yes, young feller, I've read your play, and, while it's first-class in its way, it ain't exactly what I want. Now you seem to be a pushing, active sort of a feller—if you hadn't been you never would have found your way in here—and if you can only get me up the sort of piece I want we can do a little business together. In writing a play you've got to bear one thing in mind, and that is to adapt yourself to the public taste and the resources of the theatre. Are you on?

DRAMATIST. Certainly, sir; and I shall be only too happy to write something especially for your theatre. I think I can do it if I only get a chance. Sardou is my model.

MANAGER. Well, Sardou is all right enough in his way, but I'm looking after something entirely different. Now I want a strong melodrama, and I'm going to call it *Only a Type-writer; or, The Pulse of the Great Metropolis.* There are twenty thousand type-writers in the city, and they'll all want to see it, and each of them will fetch her mother or her feller along with her. Then they'll gabble about it to all the people they know — nothing like a lot of women to advertise a piece — and if there's any go in the play at all it'll be talked about from Harlem to the Battery before it's been on the boards a week. Now, of course, there's got to be a moral; in fact, you've got to come out pretty d—d strong with your moral. My idea

is this: In the first act you show the type-writer—whose folks are all gilt-edged people and 'way up—in an elegant cottage at Newport. She's a light-hearted, innocent girl in a white muslin dress with a blue sash. I'm going to cast Pearl Livingston for the part, and she's always crazy to make up for an innocent girl. Recollect you can't spread the innocence and simplicity on too thick. Livingston wants to say a prayer with her hair hanging down her back, so if you can ring that in somehow it'll be all the better. You must give her a good entrance, too, or she'll kick like a steer.

DRAMATIST. Excuse me, but I don't see exactly how a type-writer could live in a Newport cottage.

MANAGER. I'm coming to that right away. You see this act is just to show her as a light-hearted, innocent girl whose father has always been loaded up with dust, so she's never known what it

was to holler for a sealskin sack and not get it. But in the end of the act the father goes broke and exclaims, "Merciful heavens, we are beggars!" and drops dead. His wife gives a shriek, and all the society people rush on from the wings so as to make a picture at the back, while the daughter—that's Livingston, you know—takes the centre of the stage and says, "No, mother"—or "mommer" would sound more affectionate, maybe—"No, mommer," she says, "not beggars yet, for I will work for you!" Curtain! Are you on to the idea?

DRAMATIST. Well, I believe I understand your scheme so far. But who's the hero, and where do you get your comedy element?

MANAGER. Oh, the comedy is easy enough to manage, and as for the hero, I forgot to tell you that he shows up in the first act and wants to marry her, but she gives him the bounce because he's

poor as a crow. Better make him an artist or something of that sort. It might be a good idea to have him a reporter, and then he can read some good strong lines about the dignity of his profession or something of that sort, just so as to catch on with the press boys. Well, the next act shows the girl living in a garret in New York, supporting herself and her mother by type-writing. Lay it on thick about their being poor and industrious and all that, and have some good lines about the noble working-girl or the virtuous type-writer or something of that sort. Livingston's got an elegant new silk gown that she says she's going to wear in that act, so you'll have to give her a few lines to explain that although they're poor she still has that dress and won't part with it because her father gave it to her, and so she wears it at home nights when the other one's in the wash.

DRAMATIST. Excuse me, but isn't it rather strange for a poor type-writer to appear in a handsome new silk dress when she's having hard work to support herself and her mother? Why not put her in a plain gingham gown — ?

MANAGER. Plain gingham be blowed! Say, young feller, when you know that cat Livingston as well as I do, you won't sit here talking about plain gingham gowns. No, siree; she won't touch any part unless she can dress it right up to the handle. Well, this act is in two scenes. The first is a front scene showing the humble house on the virtuous-poverty plan, with the old lady warming her hands at a little fire and saying, "Oh, it is bitter cold to-night, and the wind cuts like a knife." And then we can have the wind whistling through the garret in a melancholy sort of way. The next scene shows a broker's office where the type-writer is employed. Here you can

run in a little comedy and show them having a lot of fun while the old man is out at lunch. Livingston's got some first-rate music — sort of pathetic-like — and you can write some words to it for her to sing. Write something appropriate, such as, "I'm only a working-girl, but I'm virtuous, noble, and true." How does that sound, hey? Well, in this act her employer insults her, and she leaves him, though she hasn't a cent in the world and doesn't know where to go. You must give her a good strong scene, and have the curtain fall on a tableau of indignant virtue rebuking the tempter. You must have a picture there that we can use on a three-sheet poster. In the next act we have the grand climax. The villain still pursues her to her new place, for she gets a job with the aid of the poor young lover who was bounced in the first act. Just as the old villain is about to seize her and carry her off by main force, the

young lover rushes in and knocks him out with a fire-shovel. He falls and breaks his skull. In comes the doctor—the lover goes to fetch him—and meanwhile the type-writer gives him some pious talk and converts him. Maybe it would be a good idea to ring in the prayer in this act. Livingston's dead stuck on having it in the piece. Well, he repents of his wickedness, and when the doctor says he has only ten minutes to live he says, "Oh, if I but had the time I would make a will and leave all my wealth to this noble girl; but there is not time enough to write it." And then Livingston says, "What's the matter with my doing it on my faithful type-writing machine?" or words to that effect. So she takes it down like lightning, and he has just time to sign it before he expires. Now, young feller, you've got my idea of a play. You go to work and write something on that basis; and mind you don't forget what I said

about Livingston's prayer and silk dress, but don't work 'em both in in the same act. Fetch it around to me and maybe we can do business. Do you want to tackle the job?

DRAMATIST (*dubiously*). I'll try, sir, but I'm afraid it's a little out of my line.

THE CULTURE BUBBLE IN OURTOWN.

You must know, in the first place, that I am a resident of the thriving city of Ourtown, where for twenty years past I have held the position of librarian in the town library—a place which has, of course, brought me into contact with the most intellectual circles of society, and has won for me general recognition as the leader of literary and artistic thought in my native city.

Last winter I returned to Ourtown after a six months' absence, and found to my dismay that the social life of the place was altered almost beyond recognition. "And is the Coasting Club still

flourishing?" I inquired, eagerly, for there was a foot of snow on the ground, and my memory went back to the jolly moonlight slides that we used to enjoy on the North Hill, and the late suppers of fried oysters, beer, cheese, and even hot mince-pie which had no terrors for us.

"The Coasting Club!" retorts Mrs. Jack Symple, to whom my remark was addressed; "mercy, no! We haven't even *thought* of coasting this winter. As for me, I've been so interested in the Saturday Night Club that I haven't had a moment's time for anything else. Oh, you'll be surprised when you see how much more cultured the town is now than it was when you went away! You never hear anything now about skating or coasting or sleigh-rides or doings of that sort. It's all Ibsen and Browning and Tolstoï and pre-Raphaelite art and Emerson nowadays, and Professor Gnowital says that there's as much real culture in Our-

town, in proportion to the number of inhabitants, as there is in Boston."

My eyes dilated as Mrs. Symple rattled off this jargon about the intellectual growth of Ourtown. A year ago I had regarded her as a young woman with brain-cells of the most primitive form imaginable, picking up pebbles on the shores of the Shakespeare class; and here she was drinking deep draughts of advanced thought, and talking about Ibsen and Tolstoï and Emerson as glibly as if they were old acquaintances.

"And who is Professor Gnowital?" I asked, "and by what formula does he estimate the comparative degrees of culture to the square foot in Boston and Ourtown? He must be a man of remarkable gifts."

"Remarkable gifts!" echoed Mrs. Symple, "well, I should think so. He comes from Boston and he's been giving readings here before the Saturday Night Club.

And oh, you *must* come and make an address at the meeting next week! It's to be the grand gala one of the whole course. Professor Gnowital is coming on to attend it with some really cultivated people from Boston, and you'll be surprised to see what a fine literary society there is here now."

I agreed to address the Saturday Night Club, but I saw with deep sorrow that the town had simply gone mad over what it termed "culture." People whom I had always regarded as but little better than half-wits were gravely uttering opinions about Carlyle and Emerson, or "doing" German literature through the medium of English translations. And all this idiocy in place of the Shakespeare Club, sleigh-rides, late suppers, and coasting, that once made life so delightful for us all.

Mrs. Symple had asked me to address the club on whatever topic I might select, and while I was considering the invita-

tion a great idea took possession of my brain. To think was to act; and without a moment's delay I sat down and wrote a long letter to my old friend, Dr. Paulejeune, begging him to come up and address the club in my stead, and by so doing render a service not only to his lifelong friend, but to the great cause of enlightenment and human progress as well.

Now Dr. Paulejeune is not only an educated man with the thinking habit long fastened upon him, but also that *rara avis*, a Frenchman who thoroughly understands the language, literature, and social structure of America. Moreover he possesses in a marked degree the patriotism, wit, and cynicism of his race, and has a few hearty prejudices against certain modern vogues in art which are remote from the accepted ideals of the Latin race. Happily enough his name was well known in Ourtown by reason

of his little volume of essays, which had just then made its appearance.

Our town society never gathered in stronger force than it did on the evening of the Saturday Night Club meeting at the Assembly Rooms. At half-past eight the president of the club introduced the first speaker, Mr. W. Brindle Fantail, a young man who made himself conspicuous in Boston a few years ago by means of Browning readings, which he conducted with a brazen effrontery that compelled the unwilling admiration of his rivals. In the words of Jack Symple, "He caught the Browning boom on the rise and worked it for all it was worth." Mr. Fantail advanced to the edge of the platform, ran a large flabby hand through his dank shock of light hair, and then announced as his subject, "Tolstoï, the Modern Homer." Then, with that calm self-possession which has carried him unharmed through many a dreary mono-

logue or reading, he told his hearers what a great man Tolstoï was, and how grateful they ought to be for an opportunity to learn of his many excellences. Of course he did not put it quite as broadly as that, but that was the gist of his remarks. He told us, moreover, that the whole range of English literature contained no such work of fiction as *Sevastopol*, and that no writer of modern times excelled—or even equaled—this Russian Homer. "In short," he said, impressively, "Tolstoï is distinctly epoch-making."

The next speaker was the illustrious Professor Gnowital, who declared that Ourtown would never experience any genuine intellectual development unless a thorough study of the fantastic romances of Hoffmann was begun at once. I cannot imagine what started the professor off on that tack unless it was a desire to choose a subject of which his hearers knew absolutely nothing. His

words had a great effect, however, for very few members of the club had ever heard of Hoffmann, and it had never occurred to these that his ghostly tales were at all in the line of that modern culture which they all adored.

The next speaker was Mrs. Measel, whose career I have watched with feelings of mingled respect and amazement. Mrs. Measel has taught art in a dozen towns, lectured on the Great Unknowable in at least two of the large cities, and given "Mornings with Montaigne," "Babblings from Browning," and "Studies from Stepniak," in whatever place she could obtain a hearing. On this occasion she talked about the renaissance of something or other, I've forgotten exactly what—and, by the way, there is no better word for use in culture circles than renaissance, and that, too, whether you can pronounce it or not—well, she began with her renaissance, but very soon

branched off into a dissertation on Tolstoï and Ibsen and a few more "epoch-making" people with whose names she happened to be familiar. I remember she said that *The Doll's House* was one of the grandest plays of modern times, whereat Dr. Paulejeune, who had listened to everything up to this point without turning a hair, smiled broadly. On the whole Mrs. Measel's was a good shallow talk for good shallow people, and I am sure she made a delightful impression on us all.

Then, at a signal from the president, Dr. Paulejeune made his way to the platform and delivered an address which I am sure will never be forgotten by those who heard it. It was a daring speech for any one to make, and particularly so for a stranger, and that it proved effective in a far higher degree than either of us had ever expected was due to the tact, scholarship, subtlety, and sincerity of my distinguished friend, Dr. Émile Paulejeune.

The doctor began with a graceful tribute to the eloquence, wit, and scholarship of the speakers who had preceded him, and then went on to say that he had chosen as the subject of his discourse one of the greatest writers of fiction that the world has ever known — Daniel De Foe.

There was hearty applause at this, and some scratching of heads and obvious efforts on the part of certain guests to remember who De Foe was and what he had written. I could not help turning in my chair to take a look at Mrs. Symple. The poor little woman was leaning forward with an expression of absolute dismay on her silly face. I could read her thoughts plainly: "Oh dear, this new doctor has been and gone and dragged up another man for me to read about, and I'm sure if I get one more book into my head it'll crowd some other one out!"

But the look of dismay changed to one of blank, open-mouthed amazement, which

was shared by a large number of the guests, as Dr. Paulejeune continued impressively: "And the book which I have come prepared to speak of is *Robinson Crusoe*."

Then the doctor took up, each in its turn, the writings and writers whom we had heard commended by the previous speakers. "Tolstoï is all very well," he said, "if you happen to be fond of Russian pessimism, and are not fortunate enough to be familiar with classic English literature, which contains hundreds of stronger, better-drawn pictures than *Sevastopol*." He dismissed Hoffmann from the discussion with the contemptuous remark that he was "simply a Dutch Poe, and very Dutch at that." In speaking of Ibsen he threw his audience into convulsions of laughter by gravely comparing *The Doll's House* with Jacob Abbott's *Rollo Learning to Work*, a book which he assured us not only surpassed

Ibsen's masterpiece in the simplicity and directness of its style, but abounded in dramatic situations that were as thrilling as any that the Northern writer had ever devised. "For instance," he said, "there is a chapter in that estimable little Rollo book which tells us how the hero was making a woodpile, and, disregarding the sound counsel of the conservative Jonas, insisted upon piling the sticks of wood with the small ends out and the large ends inside against the wall of the woodshed. Do any of you, my friends, recall the scene of the heap toppling over? It is portrayed in Mr. Abbott's most realistic style, and is in itself an ideal Ibsen climax.

"Do you know," he exclaimed, advancing to the edge of the platform and shaking a long, bony forefinger at his auditors, "do you know—you who call this Scandinavian a dramatist—that perhaps the most thrilling dramatic situation in

all literature is found here in this book, *Robinson Crusoe?* If you want to know what a dramatic situation is, read Daniel De Foe's account of Crusoe finding the human footprint on the shore of his desert island. And then read the whole book carefully through and enjoy its vivid descriptions, its superb English, its philosophy, and the great lessons which it teaches. And when you have finished it ask yourselves if any man ever obtained as complete a mastery of the magic, beautiful art of story-telling as did Daniel De Foe!"

When the doctor finished his address he was greeted with thunders of applause, while Fantail, Gnowital, and Mrs. Measel sat dazed at this sudden attack on their stronghold.

"Thank Heaven for a little plain, ordinary sense at last," was the way in which some one expressed the common sentiment of the club.

"And to think," chattered Mrs. Symple, "that we were cultivated all along and didn't know it! Why, I read the Rollo books and *Robinson Crusoe* when I was a child, and never dreamt that they were artistic or literary or that sort of thing. I thought they were just stories. The idea of our paying a dollar apiece for Mrs. Measel's lectures, and muddling our heads with Ibsen and Tolstoï and the rest of them that Professor Gnowital told us were so grand, while all the time we were really cultured and didn't know it!"

The result of my friend's lecture was that within a week we were sliding downhill and enjoying ourselves in the old way, and in less than a fortnight the prophets of culture had departed in search of fresh pastures.

I do hope, however, that Mrs. Measel will succeed, for she deserves to if ever a woman did. She has educated two children on the profits — or rather the spoils

—of the Browning craze, and has made Tolstoï pay for the care of an invalid sister. She gives more culture for the money than any one in the business, and I can heartily commend her to any club or community that feels a yearning for the Unknowable.

SOME THOUGHTS ON THE CONSTRUCTION AND PRESERVATION OF JOKES.

I.—THE "JOKAL CALENDAR."

EVERY joke has its appropriate season. The true humorist—one who finds comedy in everything—gathers his ideas from what goes on about him, and by a subtle alchemy of his own distils from them jokes suitable to the changing seasons. The only laws to which childhood willingly yields obedience are those unwritten statutes which compel the proper observance of "trap-time," "kite-time," and "marble-time." So even must the humorist recognize the different periods allotted respectively to goats,

stovepipes, ice-cream, and other foundations of merriment.

The *Jokal Calendar* begins in the early summer, when girls are leading young men into ice-cream saloons, and keepers of summer resorts are preparing new swindles for their guests. Soon the farmer will gather in his crop of summer boarders; the city fisherman will entangle his patent flies in the branches of lofty trees, while the country lad catches all the trout with a worm. Then the irate father and the bulldog will drive the lover from the front gate, while married men who remain in the city during their wives' absence play poker until early morn and take grass-widows to Coney Island. About this time the chronicler of humor goes into the country, whence he will return in the early fall with a fresh stock of ideas, gathered in the village store, at the farm-house table, and by the shores of the sounding sea.

Beginning his autumn labors with the scent of the hay-fields in his nostrils, and the swaying boughs of the pine forest still whispering in his ears, the humorist offers a few dainty paragraphs on the simple joys of rural life. The farmer who dines in his shirt-sleeves, the antiquity of the spring fowl, the translucent milk, and the saline qualities of the pork which grace the table; the city man who essays to milk the cow, and the country deacon who has been "daown to York"—all these are sketched with vivid pen for the delectation of his readers. But it must be remembered that these subjects have been used during the whole summer; and the humorist, after his return to the city, can offer, at the best, but an aftermath of farm-house fun. If it be a late fall the public may slide along on banana and orange peel jokes until the first cold snap warns housekeepers of the necessity of putting up stovepipes.

(NOTE.—About this time print paragraph of gas-company charging a man for gas while his house was closed for the summer. Allusions to the extortions of gas-companies are always welcome.)

Stovepipe jokes must be touched upon lightly, for the annual spring house-cleaning will bring the pipes down again, six months later, to the accompaniment of cold dinners, itinerant pails of hot soapsuds, and other miseries incident to that domestic event.

And now that the family stovepipe has ceased to exude smoke at every joint and pore, the humorist finds himself fairly equipped for his year's work. The boys are at school; lodge-meetings have begun, and sleepless wives are waiting for their truant lords; college graduates are seeking positions in newspaper offices (and sometimes getting and keeping them, though it won't do to let the public know it); election is at hand, and

candidates are kissing babies and setting up the drinks for their constituents; young men of slender means are laying pipes for thicker clothes — in short, a man must be dull of wit who cannot find food for comic paragraphs in what goes on about him at this fruitful season. The ripening of the chestnut-burr, and the harvesting of its fruit — beautifully symbolical of the humorist's vocation — form another admirable topic at this time.

Winter comes with its snow and ice, and the small boy, who is always around, moulds the one into balls for destructive warfare, while corpulent gentlemen and pedestrians bearing eggs and other fragile articles slip and fall on the other. Oyster-stews, and girls who pine for them; the female craving for matinée tickets, and the high hats which obstruct the view of those in the back seats; nocturnal revelry in saloon and ball-room; low-necked dresses; and the extortionate idle-

ness of the plumber now keep the pen of the comic writer constantly at work. Chapters on the pawning, borrowing, lending, and renovation of the dress-coat are also timely.

Spring brings the perennial spring poet with his rejected manuscript; the actor with his winter's ulster; the health-giving bock-beer; and, above all, the goat, in the delineation of whose pranks and follies the *Jokal Calendar* reaches its climax.

What the reindeer is to the Laplander the goat is to the writer of modern humor. His whole life is devoted to the service of the paragraphist. He eats tomato-cans and crinoline; he rends the theatre-poster from the wall, and consumes the bucket of paste; he rends the clothes from the line, and devours the curtain that flutters in the basement window; he upsets elderly men, and charges, with lowered horns, at lone and fear-stricken women.

But as the encroachments of civilization have driven the buffalo from his native plains, so is the goat, propelled by a stern city ordinance, slowly but surely disappearing from the streets and vacant lots which once knew him so well. He is making his last stand now in the rocky fastnesses of Harlem. I have seen him perched on an inaccessible crag on the border-land of Morrisania, looking down with solemn eyes on the great city where he once roamed careless and free from can to ash-barrel. Etched against a background of lowering clouds, his was, indeed, an impressive figure, the apotheosis of American humor.

II. — THE IDEA AND ITS EMBELLISHMENT.

In the construction of a joke the chief requisite is the Idea.

Making jokes without ideas is like making bricks without straw; and the

people who tried that were sent out into the Wilderness to wander for forty years and live exclusively on manna and water —a diet which is not provocative of humor. Indeed it is a noteworthy fact that although the children of Israel were accompanied in their journeying by herds of goats, and were constantly hearing stories of the huge squashes and clusters of grapes which grew in the Promised Land—the California of that period—yet we have no record that they availed themselves of such obvious opportunities for jesting.

The humorist, having procured his Idea, should divest it of all superfluities, place it on the table before him, and then fall into a reverie as to its possibilities. Let us suppose, for example, that his Idea, in a perfectly nude condition, looks something like this:

"A girl is thin enough to make a good match for any one."

Now it will not do to offer this simple statement as a joke. It is merely an Idea, or the nucleus of a short story, and can be greatly improved by a little verbiage.

There would be no point gained in calling the girl a New Yorker, or even a Philadelphian, though the latter city is usually fair game for the paragraphist. She should certainly hail from Boston. The girls of that city are identified in the popular mind with eye-glasses, long words, angularity and other outward and visible signs of severe mental discipline and parsimony in diet. The ideal Boston girl is not rotund. On the contrary, she is endowed with a sharply defined outline, and a profile which suggests self-abnegation in the matter of food. A little dialect will help the story along amazingly; therefore let the scene be laid in rural New England, and let the point be made with the usual rustic prefix of "Wa-al!" This will afford an opportunity to utilize

a few minor ideas relative to New England rural customs, the maintenance of city boarders, the food provided, the economy practised, and other salient features of country life.

So, by judicious expansion—not padding—the humorist will stretch his little paragraph into a very respectable story, something like this:

Sample of Short Story Erected on Paragraph.

A summer evening of exquisite calm and sweetness. The golden haze of sunset sheds its soft tints on hill and plain, and pours a flood of mellow light over the roofs and trees of the quaint old village street. The last rays of the sun, falling through the waving boughs of elm and maple, form a checkered, ever-moving pattern on the wall of the meeting-house; they kindle beacon-fires on the

distant heights of Baldhead Mountain, and linger in tender caress on the dainty auburn tresses of Priscilla Whitney, who is displaying her flounces, furbelows, and other "citified fixin's" on the front piazza of Deacon Pogram's residence.

(It will be seen that the beginning of this paragraph is written in a serious vein; but the last two lines prepare the reader for a comic story. He now makes up his mouth for the laugh which awaits him a little farther along.)

From the kitchen comes a pleasant aroma of burnt bread-crusts, as dear old Samanthy Pogram, her kindly face covered with its snow-white glory, prepares the coffee for supper. Meanwhile the worthy deacon, in stocking-feet and shirt-sleeves, sits by the open door and enjoys the cool evening breeze that sweeps in refreshing gusts down the fertile valley of the Pockohomock.

"There ye be again, Sarah," says Aunt

Samanthy to the hired help, a shade of annoyance crossing her fine old face. "Hain't I told ye time 'n' again not to put fresh eggs in the boarders' omelet? I suppose ye think there hain't such a thing as a stale egg in the haouse, but ye must be wastin' good ones on the city folks! Sakes alive! but I'll be glad when they've cleaned aout, bag 'n' baggage. I'm nigh tuckered aout a-waitin' on 'em 'n' puttin' up with their frills 'n' fancy doin's."

"They tell me, Samanthy," says the deacon, "that young Rube Perkins is kinder makin' up to one of aour boarders. I s'pose ye hain't noticed nothin', mebbe?"

"I've seen him a-settin' alongside o' that dough-faced critter times enough so he'd like ter wear aout the rocker on the piazzy; but I guess Rube had better not set enny too much store by what *she* says to him. Them high-toned Whitney folks o' hern daown Bosting way hain't over

'n' above anxious to hev Rube Perkins fur a son-in-law, I kin tell ye."

"Wa-al," drawls the deacon, reflectively, "I kalkerlate they've got an idee she'd better make a good match while she's abaout it."

"She's thin enough to make a lucifer match," rejoins Aunt Samanthy; and with this parting bit of irony she goes in to put the saleratus biscuit on the tea-table.

Of course this is not a model of a humorous story, but it will pass muster. It is, however, a very creditable specimen of a story built up, as I have shown, on a very slender foundation. Some humorists would give it an apologetic title, such as "Rural Sarcasm," or "Aunt Samanthy's Little Joke," in order to let the reader down easy.

III. — REVAMPING OLD JOKES.

It often happens that the humorist finds himself unexpectedly called upon for jokes at a moment when he has no ideas about him. Perhaps he is away from his workshop where his tools are kept, or perhaps he has lost the combination of the safe in which his precious ideas are securely locked up. The problem of how to make bricks without straw, and the awful fate of the people who attempted it, stares him in the face. But his keen intelligence comes to his aid. Like the trusty guide in Mayne Reid's story, he exclaims, "Ha, it is the celebrated joke-root bush, called by the Apaches the ha-ha plant!" and seizing an ancient jest, he tears it from the soil, carefully cleanses the esculent root from its clinging mould, and then proceeds to revamp it for modern use.

The joke should be one that has slowly ripened under the suns of distant climes and other days. It should be perfectly mellow, and care must be taken to remove from it all particles of dust and lichen. Let us suppose, for example, that the joke, divested of all superfluities, presents this appearance:

"A man once gave his friend a very small cup of very old wine, and the friend remarked that it was the smallest thing of its age he had ever seen."

I have selected this joke because it is one of the oldest of which the world has any record.

The world has known many changes since civilization reached the point that made old wine an appreciated and acknowledged delight to the dwellers in the fertile valley of the Euphrates, and thus threw open the doors for the appearance of this joke. The dust of him who gave and of him who drank the wine are

blended together in the soil of that once populous region. Stately sarcophagi mark the last resting-places of many who have enjoyed this ancient bit of merriment. Empires have crumbled since then; mighty rulers have yielded the insignia of their power at the imperative summons of the conqueror of all; yet nothing has interrupted the stately, solemn march of this joke along the corridors of time. It flourished in Byzantium; it lingered in tender caress on each of the seven hills of Rome; when Hannibal led his cohorts across the snow-clad Alps it stepped out from behind a crag and said, "Here we are again!" And the astonished warrior recognized it at once, although it wore a peaked hat and a goitre.

It has awakened laughter among effeminate and refined Athenians as they lay stretched in languid and perfumed ease immediately after the luxurious bath, and about two hundred years before Christ.

It has been said that cleanliness is next to godliness, and yet we find that in this instance there was room to slip this joke in between the two, and have two hundred years of space left.

It is found in the sacred writings of Confucius, side by side with his memorable injunction to his followers not to shed a single cuff or sock unless the ticket should be forthcoming. Under the iron crown of Lombardy and the lilies of France this joke has lived and thrived. It has even been published in the *Philadelphia Ledger*, which is a sure proof of its antiquity.

Surely no one but an American humorist could look upon this hoary relic without feelings of veneration. Let us see what the humorist does with it:

That which has worn a toga in Rome and a coat of mail in the middle ages, he now clothes in the habiliments of the present day. Watch him as he arrays it

in the high hat, the patent-leather shoes, the cutaway coat, and the eye-glasses of modern times, and, behold, we have:

"Young Arthur Cecil, of the Knickerbocker Club, prides himself on his knowledge of wines, and boasts of a cellar of his own which cannot be matched on this side of the water. Bilkins dined with him the other night, and as a great treat his host poured out into a liquor-glass a few drops of priceless old ——.

"'There, my boy,' he exclaimed, 'you'll not find a drop of that anywhere in New York except on my table!'

"Bilkins took it down at a single gulp, smacked his lips, and said:

"'I'll tell you what it is, old man. There ain't many things lying around loose that are as old as this and haven't grown any bigger.'

"The joke was too good to keep, and Cecil had to square himself at the club by ordering up a basket of Mumm."

IV.—THE OBVIOUS JOKE.

A large class of simple-minded people believe that the obvious joke is the most delightful form of humor. An obvious joke is one whose point or climax can be seen from the very start, and is, in fact, a natural sequence to the beginning.

For example, when we begin to read of a city dude who professed to understand the distinctively rural art of milking a cow, and volunteered to show his friends how to do it, we know perfectly well that he is going to get knocked out in the attempt, and that the story will end in a humorous description of the indignities inflicted upon him by the enraged animal. The only chance for variety in the sketch lies in the manner in which the cow will resent the dude's impertinence. She may impale him on one or both of her horns; she may hurl him

on a dunghill and dance on his prostrate form; she may content herself with kicking him; but whatever she does she will be sure to upset the milk-pail and excite the laughter of the lover of obvious humor. Of course a professional humorist never reads an obvious joke. He knows exactly what is going to happen the moment his eye falls on the first paragraph.

If a tatterdemalion appears at the county fair with a broken-down plug which he offers to trot against any horse on the track, the professional humorist knows that the decrepit charger is going to win the race, and that his owner will go away with his pockets bulging out with the money he has won from the too confiding.

If a man holding four aces is persistently raised by a gentleman of quiet demeanor and bland, childlike face, we can call the latter's hand without looking at it, because we know from long familiar-

ity with American humorous literature, as well as poker, that he holds a straight flush. Some writers have had the effrontery to deal him a royal flush, forgetting that he has already given his opponent all the aces.

If a gentleman of apparently delicate physique resents the impertinence of a bully who is forcing his attentions upon a lady, we know, without reading to the end of the chapter, that the man of effeminate build is in reality a prize-fighter or a college athlete, and will bundle the bully out on the sidewalk with great rapidity.

The professional humorist shuns these "comics" as he would the plague. They make him tired. He knows how easy they are to construct. Moreover he despises alike the mind that gives them birth and that which finds them funny.

The recipe for their concoction is very simple:

Think of some acquaintance who habitually eats sugar on his lettuce and sweetens his claret. The man who says, "I don't want none of this *I*-talian caterwaulin'. The good old-fashioned tunes, like 'Silver Threads among the Gold,' suit me right down to the ground. I don't want none of yer fancy gimcracks 'n' kickshaws in mine." Try to remember the sort of thing that has moved this man to laughter, and then fashion a joke on the same plan, taking pains to make it apparent to the most primitive intellect.

Persons of this description are found in large numbers in the rural districts, and, therefore, any story tending to cast ridicule on the city man who puts on airs, or, in other words, affects the amenities of civilized life, is sure to be appreciated.

For example: It is the delight of sportsmen to fish for trout with fly-rods and tackle of an elaborate description, to the intense amusement of the yokel who

catches fish, not for sport, but in order that he may sell them at an exorbitant price to some ignorant stranger. Now it is a very easy matter to compose a story on this basis suited to the comprehension of such a rustic.

The following is a fair specimen of a story of the class I have described:

"He was a real sportsman, just from the city, and he had come down into the country to show the benighted inhabitants how to catch fish. He had a new patent rod in his right hand and a brand-new basket over his left shoulder. In his coat-tail pocket he carried a silver flask, and in his breast-pocket a big wallet filled with all the latest devices in newfangled flies. He walked down the road with the air of a man who had come to catch fish and knew just how to do it.

"It was growing dark when he returned to the hotel, wet, muddy, and weary, and sadly laid aside his implements of sport.

"'Fish don't bite in this blawsted country, yer know,' was his reply to the landlord's cheery inquiry, 'What luck?'

"And just at this moment who should come along but old Bill Simons's sandy-haired, freckle-faced boy Jim, with his birch-pole over his shoulder, and a fine string of the speckled beauties in his brown paw.

"'Good Gawd!' exclaimed the dude, 'how did you catch those, me boy?'

"'Hook 'n' line, yer fool! How d'yer s'pose?' was Jim's answer, as he pulled a handful of angleworms, the last of his bait, from his pocket, and threw them out of the window."

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